

UNIVERSITY SELECTIONS

THREE-YEAR DEGREE COURSE

ALTERNATIVE ENGLISH

Second Edition

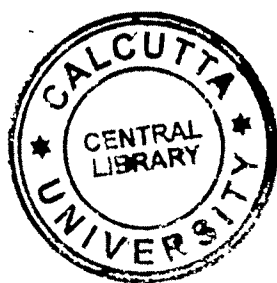


**UNIVERSITY OF CALCUTTA
2011**

**THREE YEAR DEGREE COURSE
UNIVERSITY SELECTIONS FOR
ALTERNATIVE ENGLISH**

39

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2011**

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FOREWARD

This is a collection of Essays, Poems and Short Stories for the students of Alternative English in 3-year Degree (General & Honours) Course, published exclusively by the University of Calcutta following the recommendation of the Undergraduate Board of Studies in Compulsory Languages in Arts, Science and Commerce. The conventional collections often omit the contemporary writers in spite of the undeniable signs of originality in their style and thinking. The present collection, therefore, incorporates the writings of some of the eminent contemporary authors by virtue of the collective effort of the members of the Undergraduate Board of Studies in Compulsory Languages.

We express our gratitude on behalf of the University of Calcutta to the authors whose writings have been included in this collection and to their publishers as well. We also extend our thanks for the publication of the present collection to Prof. Anil Roy, Prof. Biswanath Maji and Dr. Soumitra Sankar Dasgupta for their ample Co-operation. Thanks are also due to Mr. Pradip Kumar Ghosh, Superintendent, Calcutta University Press, and its other employees for their unstinted co-operation.

Pratap Ranjan Hazra

Chairman

*for U.G. Board of Studies, Comp. Languages
University of Calcutta*

Content

Essays :

Ideals of Education	— Rabindranath Tagore	1
Sir Roger at Home	— Joseph Addison	7
Dream Children : A Review	— Charles Lamb	11
Personal Style	— J. A. Symonds	16
Freedom	— G. B. Shaw	22
Science and War	— J. Bronowski	31

Poems :

To the Skylark	— W. Wordsworth	35
La Belle Dame Sans Merci	— J. Keats	36
Ulysses	— Lord Tennyson	38
Dover Beach	— M. Arnold	41
Strange Meeting	— Wilfred Owen	43
Pied Beauty	— Hopkins	45

Short Stories :

The Lotus Eater	— W. S. Maugham	46
The Ox	— H. E. Bates	63
The Martyr's Corner	— R. K. Narayan	85
Araby	— James Joyce	93
The Fly	— Katherine Mansfield	100

Comprehension Piece :

On Love	— P. B. Shelley	107
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Poetry :

London 1802	— William Wordsworth	110
The Stolen Child	— W. B. Yeats	111
Anthem for the Doomed Youth	— Wilfred Owen	113

Short Stories :

The Lagoon	— Joseph Conrad	114
The Lost Jewels	— Rabindranath Tagore	130

IDEALS OF EDUCATION

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

The greatest man of modern India, Raja Rammohun Roy was born in Bengal and was the best friend of my grandfather. He had courage to overcome the prohibition against sea voyage which we had in our country at the time; and he crossed the sea, and came into touch with the great western minds.

My father was fortunate in coming under the influence of Rammohun Roy from his early years which helped him to free himself from the sectarian barriers, from traditions of worldly and social ideas that were very rigid, in many aspects very narrow and not altogether beneficial. My father drew from our ancient scriptures, from the Upanishads, truths which had universal significance, and not anything that were exclusive to any particular age or any particular people. We were ostracized by society and this liberated us from the responsibility of conforming to all those conventions that had not the value of truth, that were mere irrational habits bred in the inertia of the racial mind. In my boyhood's dreams I claimed such freedom that we had tasted, for all humanity.

Nations are kept apart not merely by international jealousy but also by their own past, handicapped by the burden of the dead and decaying, the breeding ground of diseases that attack the spiritual man. I could not believe that generations of peoples, century after century, must have their birth chamber in a moral and intellectual coffin which has its restricted space-regulation for a body that has lost its movements. Civilization has its inevitable tendency to accumulate dead materials and to make elaborate adjustments for their accommodation, leaving less and less room for life with its claim to grow in freedom. There are signs of that in India, and I know today that it is more or less true in all races, for our mind has its inclination to grow lazy as it grows old and to shirk its duty

to make changes in the rhythm of the changing times. In the very heart of this rigid rule of the dead, I was brought up in an atmosphere of aspiration, aspiration for the expansion of the human spirit. We in our home sought freedom of power in our language, freedom of imagination in our literature, freedom of soul in our religious creeds and that of mind in our social environment. Such an opportunity has given me confidence in the power of education which is one with life and only which can give us real freedom, the highest that is claimed for man, his freedom of moral communion in the human world. The ghosts of ideals which no longer have a living reality have become the obsession of all nations that carry an overwhelming past behind them perpetually overshadowing their future.

The reign of the ghost has strewn the path of our history lessons with mischief, with prejudices that ever obstruct the mutual understanding of nations, that helps in the cultivation of the thorny crop of national vanity and unscrupulousness in international relationship. From our young days our minds are deliberately trained with the aid of untrue words and unholy symbolism in the name of patriotism to a collective moral attitude, which we condemn in individuals.

Persons who have no faith in human nature are apt to think that such conditions are eternal in man—that the moral ideals are only for individuals but the race belongs to that primitive nature which is for the animal. And according to them, in the racial life, it is necessary that the animal should have its full scope of training in the cult of suspicion, jealousy, fierce destructiveness, cruel rapacity. The contemptuously brand optimism as sentimental weakness, and yet in spite of that virulent scepticism an enormous change has worked itself out in course of the growth of civilization from the darkest abyss of savagery. I refuse to believe that human society has reached its limit of moral possibility. And we must work all our strength for the seemingly impossible, and must believe that there is a constant urging in the depth of human soul for the attainment

of the perfect, the urging which secretly helps us in all our endeavour for the good. This faith has been my only asset in the educational mission which I have made my life's work, and almost unaided and alone, I struggle along my path. I try to assert in my words and works that education has its only meaning and object in freedom—freedom from ignorance about the laws of universe, and freedom from passion and prejudice in our communication with the human world. In my institution I have attempted to create an atmosphere of naturalness in our relationship with strangers, and the spirit of hospitality which is the first virtue in men that made civilization possible.

I invited thinkers and scholars from foreign lands to let our boys know how easy it is to realize our common fellowship, when we deal with those who are great, and that it is the puny who with their petty vanities set up barriers between man and man.

I am glad that I have the opportunity today of letting my friends in Japan know something of my life-long cause and to assure them that it is not special to India but it will ever wait for acceptance by other races.

We in India are unfortunate in not having the chance to give expression to the best in us in creating intimate relations with the powerful peoples of the world. The bond between the nations today is made with links of mutual menace, its strength depending upon the force of panic, and leading to an enormous waste of resources in a competition of browbeating and bluff. Some great voice is waiting to be heard which will usher in the sacred light of truth in the dark region of the nightmare of politics. But we in India have not yet had the chance. Yet we have our own human voice which truth demands. Even in the region where we are not invited to act we have our right to judge and to guide the mind of man to a proper point of view, to the vision of ideality in the heart of the real.

The activity represented in human education is a world wide one, it is a great movement of universal co-operation inter-

linked by different ages and countries. And India, through defeated in her political destiny, has her responsibility to hold up the cause of truth, even to cry in the wilderness, and offer her lessons to the world in the best gifts which she could produce. The messengers of truth have ever joined their hands across centuries, across the seas, across historical barriers, and they help to form the great continent of human brotherhood. Education in all its different forms and channels has its ultimate purpose in the evolving of a luminous sphere of human mind from the nebula that has been rushing round ages to find in itself an eternal centre of unity. We individuals, however small may be our power and whatever corner of the world we may belong to, have the claim upon us to add to the light of the consciousness that comprehends all humanity. And for this cause I ask your co-operation, not merely because co-operation gives us strength in our work but because co-operation itself is the best aspect of the truth we represent, it is an end and not merely the means.

My friends, you are new converts to western ideals, in other words, the ideals belonging to the scientific view of life and the world. This is great and it is foolish to belittle its importance by wrongly describing it as materialism. For truth is spiritual in itself, and truly materialistic is the mind of the animal which is unscientific and therefore unable to cross the dark screen of appearance, of accidents, and reach the deeper region of universal laws. Science means intellectual probity in our dealings with the material world. This conscientiousness of mind is spiritual, for it never judges its results from the standard of external profits. But in science the oft-used half truth that honesty is the best policy has proved itself to be completely true. Science being mind's honesty in its relation to the physical universe never fails to bring us the best profit for our living. And mischief finds its entry through this backdoor of utility, and Satan has had his ample chance of making use of the divine fruit of knowledge for bringing shame upon humanity. Science

as the best policy is tempting the primitive in man bringing out his evil passions through the respectable cover that it has supplied him. And this is why it is all the more needed today that we should have faith in ideals that have matured in the spiritual field through ages of human endeavour after perfection, the golden crops that have developed in different forms and in different soils but whose food value for man's spirit has the same composition. These are not for the local markets but for the universal hospitality, for sharing life's treasures with each other and realizing that human civilization is a spiritual feast the invitation to which is open to all, it is never for the ravenous orgies of carnage where the food and the feeders are being torn to pieces.

The legends of nearly all human races carry man's faith in a golden age which appeared as the introductory chapter in human civilization. It shows that man has his instinctive belief in the objectivity of spiritual ideals though this cannot be proved. It seems to him that they have already been given to him and that this gift has to be proved through his history against obstacles. The idea of millenium so often laughed at by the clever is treasured as the best asset by man in his mythology as complete truth realized for ever in some ageless time. Admitting that it is not a scientific fact we must at the same time know that the instinct cradled and nourished in these primitive stories has its eternal meaning. It is like the instinct of a chick which dimly feels that an infinite world of freedom is already given to it, that it is not a subjective dream but an objective reality, even truer than its life within the egg. If a chick has a rationalistic tendency of mind it ought not to believe in a freedom which is difficult to imagine and contradictory to all its experience, but all the same it cannot help pecking at its shell and ever accepting it as ultimate. The human soul confined in its limitation has also dreamt of a millenium and striven for an emancipation which seems impossible of attainment, and it felt its reverence for some great source of

inspiration in which all its experience of the true, good and beautiful finds its reality though it cannot be proved, the reality in which our aspiration for freedom in truth, freedom in love, freedom in the unity of man is ideally realized for ever.

SIR ROGER AT HOME

JOSEPH ADDISON

Having often received an invitation from my friend Sir Roger de Coverley to pass away a month with him in the country, I last week accompanied him thither, and am settled with him for some time at his country-house, where I intend to form several of my ensuing speculations. Sir Roger, who is very well acquainted with my humour, lets me rise and go to bed when I please; dine at his own table or in my chamber as I think fit, sit still and say nothing without bidding me be merry. When the gentlemen of the country come to see him, he only shows me at a distance : as I have been walking in his fields I have observed them stealing a sight of me over a hedge, and have heard the knight desiring them not to let me see them, for that I hated to be stared at.

I am the more at ease in Sir Roger's family, because it consists of sober and staid persons : for as the knight is the best master in the world, he seldom changes his servants; and as he is beloved by all about him, his servants never care for leaving him; by this means his domestics are all in years, and grown old with their master. You would take his valet-de-chambre for his brother, his butler is greyheaded, his groom is one of the gravest men that I have ever seen, and his coachman has the looks of a privy-counsellor. You see the goodness of the master even in the old house-dog, and in a grey pad that is kept in the stable with great care and tenderness out of regard to his past services, though he has been useless for several years.

I could not but observe with a great deal of pleasure the joy that appeared in the countenance of these ancient domestics upon my friend's arrival at his country-seat. Some of them could not refrain from tears at the sight of their old master; every one of them pressed forward to do something for him, and seemed discouraged if they were not employed. At the same time the

good old knight; with a mixture of the father and the master of the family, tempered the inquiries after his own affairs with several kind questions relating to themselves. This humanity and good nature engages everybody to him, so that when he is pleasant upon any of them, all his family are in good humour, and none so much as the person whom he diverts himself with : on the contrary, if coughs, or betrays any infirmity of old age, it is easy for a stander by to observe a secret concern in the looks of all his servants.

My worthy friend has put me under the particular care of his butler, who is a very prudent man, and, as well as the rest of his fellow-servants, wonderfully desirous of pleasing me, because they have often heard their master talk of me as of his particular friend.

My chief companion, when Sir Roger is diverting himself in the woods or the fields, is a very venerable man who is ever with Sir Roger, and has lived at his house in the nature of a chaplain above thirty years. This gentleman is a person of good sense and some learning, of a very regular life and obliging conversation : he heartily loves Sir Roger, and knows that he is very much in the old knight's esteem, so that he lives in the family rather as a relation than a dependant.

I have observed in several of my papers, that my friend Sir Roger, amidst all his good qualities, is something of a humorist; and that his virtues, as well as imperfections, are as it were, tinged by a certain extravagance, which makes them particularly his, and distinguishes them from those of other men. This cast of mind, as it is generally very innocent in itself, so it renders his conversation highly agreeable, and more delightful than the same degree of sense and virtue would appear in their-common or ordinary colours. As I was walking with him last night, he asked me how I liked the good man whom I have just now mentioned; and, without staying for my answer, told me that he was afraid of being insulted with Latin and Greek at his own table; for which reason he desired a

particular friend of his at the university to find him out a clergyman rather of plain sense than much learning, of a good aspect, a clear voice, a sociable temper : and, if possible, a man that understood a little of back-gammon. "My friend", says Sir Roger, "found me out this gentleman, who, besides the endowments required of him, is, they tell me, a good scholar, though he does not show it : I have given him the parsonage of the parish; and because I know his value, have settled upon him a good annuity for life. If he outlives me, he shall find that he was higher in my esteem than perhaps he thinks he is. He has now been with me thirty years; and though he does not know I have taken notice of it, has never in all that time asked anything of me for himself, though he is every day soliciting me for something in behalf of one or other of my tenants, his parishioners. There has not been a law-suit in the parish since he has lived among them; if any dispute arises they apply themselves to him for the decision; if they do not acquiesce in his judgement, which I think never happened above once or twice at most, they appeal to me. At his first settling with me, I made him a present of all the good sermons which have been printed in English, and only begged of him that every Sunday he would pronounce one of them in the pulpit. Accordingly, he has digested them into such a series, that they follow one another naturally, and make a continued system of practical divinity.

As Sir Roger was going on in his story, the gentleman we were talking of came up to us; and upon the knight's asking him who preached to-morrow (for it was Saturday night) told us, the Bishop of St. Asaph in the morning, and Dr. South in the afternoon. He then showed us his list of preachers for the whole year, where I saw with a great deal of pleasure Archbishop Tillotson, Bishop Saunderson, Dr. Barrow, Dr. Calamy, with several living authors who have published discourses of practical divinity. I no sooner saw this venerable man in the pulpit, but I very much approved of my friend's insisting upon

the qualifications of a good aspect and a clear voice; for I was so charmed with the gracefulness of his figure and delivery, as well as with the discourses he pronounced, that I think I never passed any time more to my satisfaction. A sermon repeated after this manner, is like the composition of a poet in the mouth of a graceful actor.

I could heartily wish that more of our country clergy would follow this example; and instead of wasting their spirits in laborious compositions of their own, would endeavour after a handsome elocution, and all those other talents that are proper to enforce what has been penned by greater masters. This would not only be more easy to themselves, but more edifying to the people.

DREAM-CHILDREN : A REVERIE

FROM
'ESSAYS OF ELIA'
CHARLES LAMB

Children love to listen to stories about their elders when they were children; to stretch their imagination to the conception of a traditionary great-uncle, or grandame whom they never saw. It was in this spirit that my little ones crept about me the other evening to hear about their great-grandmother Field, who lived in a great house in Norfolk (a hundred times bigger than that in which they and papa lived) which had been the scene—so at least it was generally believed in that part of the country—of the tragic incidents which they had lately become familiar with from the ballad of the Children in the Wood. Certain it is that the whole story of the children and their cruel uncle was to be seen fairly carved out in wood upon the chimney-piece of the great hall, the whole story down to the Robin Redbreasts, till a foolish rich person pulled it down to set up a marble one of modern invention in its stead, with no story upon it. Here Alice put out one of her dear mother's looks, too tender to be called upbraiding. Then I went on to say, how religious and how good their great-grandmother Field was, how beloved and respected by everybody, though she was not indeed the mistress of this great house, but had only the charge of it (and yet in some respects she might be said to be the mistress of it too) committed to her by the owner, who preferred living in a newer and more fashionable mansion which he had purchased somewhere in the adjoining country; but still she lived in it in a manner as if it had been her own, and kept up the dignity of the great house in a sort while she lived, which afterwards came to decay, and was nearly pulled down, and all its old ornaments stripped and carried away to the owner's other house, where they were set up, and looked as awkward as if some one were

to carry away the old tombs they had seen lately at the Abbey, and stick them up in Lady C's tawdry gilt drawing room. Here John smiled, as much as to say, 'that would be foolish indeed'. And then I told how, when she came to die, her funeral was attended by a concourse of all the poor, and some of the gentry too, of the neighbourhood for many miles round, to show their respect for her memory, because she had been such a good and religious woman; so good indeed that she knew all the Psalter by heart, ay, and a great part of the Testament besides. Here little Alice spread her hands. Then I told what a tall, upright graceful person their great-grandmother Field once was; and how in her youth she was esteemed the best dancer—here Alice's little right foot played an involuntary movement, till, upon my looking grave, it desisted—the best dancer, I was saying, in the country, till a cruel disease, called a cancer, came, and bowed her down with pain; but it could never bend her good spirits, or make them stoop, but they were still upright, because she was so good and religious. Then I told how she was used to sleep by herself in a lone chamber of the great lone house; and how she believed that an apparition of two infants was to be seen at midnight gliding up and down the great stair-case near where she slept, but she said 'those innocents would do her no harm'; and how frightened I used to be, though in those days I had my maid to sleep with me, because I was never half so good or religious as she—and yet I never saw the infants. Here John expanded all his eyebrows and tried to look courageous. Then I told how good she was to all her grand-children, having us to the great house in the holidays, where I in particular used to spend many hours by myself, in gazing upon the old busts of the twelve Caesars, that had been Emperors of Rome, till the old marble heads would seem to live again, or I to be turned into marble with them; how I never could be tired with roaming about that huge mansion, with its vast empty rooms, with their worn-out hangings fluttering tapestry, and carved oaken panels, with the gilding almost

rubbed out—sometimes in the spacious old-fashioned gardens, which I had almost to myself, unless when now and then a solitary gardening man would cross me—and how the nectarines and peaches hung upon the walls, without my ever offering to pluck them because they were forbidden fruit, unless now and then—and because I had more pleasure in strolling about among the old melancholy-looking yew-trees, or the firs, and picking up the red berries, and the fir-apples, which were good for nothing but to look at—or in lying about upon the fresh grass, with all the fine garden smells around me—or basking in the orangery, till I could almost fancy myself ripening too along with the oranges and the limes in the grateful warmth—or in watching the dace that darted to and fro in the fish-pond, at the bottom of the garden; with here and there a great sulky pike hanging midway down the water in silent state, as if it mocked-at their impertinent friskings—I had more pleasure in these busy-idle diversions than in all the sweet flavours of peaches, nectarines, oranges, and such-like common baits of children. Here John slyly deposited back upon the plate a bunch of grapes, which, not unobserved by Alice, he had meditated dividing with her, and both seemed willing to relinquish them for the present as irrelevant. Then in somewhat a more heightened tone, I told how, though their great-grandmother Field loved all her grand-children, yet in an especial manner, she might be said to love their uncle, John L—, because he was so handsome and spirited a youth, and a king to the rest of us; and, instead of moping about in solitary corners, like some of us, he would mount the most mettlesome horse he could get, when but an imp no bigger than themselves, and make it carry him half over the country in a morning, and join the hunters when there were any out—and yet he loved the old great house and gardens too, but had too much spirit to be always pent up within their boundaries—and how their uncle grew up to man's estate as brave as he was handsome, to the admiration of everybody, but of their great-grandmother Field

most especially; and how he used to carry me upon his back when I was a lame-footed boy—for he was a good bit older than me—many a mile when I could not walk for pain;—and how in after life he became lame-footed too, and I did not always (I fear) make allowances enough for him when he was impatient, and in pain, nor remember sufficiently how considerate he had been to me when I was lame-footed; and how when he died, though he had not been dead an hour, it seemed as if he had died a great while ago, such a distance there is between life and death; and how I bore his death as I thought pretty well at first, but afterwards it haunted and haunted me; and though I did not cry or take it to heart as some do, and as I think he would have done if I had died, yet I missed him all day long, and knew not till then how much I had loved him. I missed his kindness, and I missed his crossness, and wished him to be alive again, to be quarrelling with him (for we quarrelled sometimes) rather than not have him again, and was as uneasy without him, as he their poor uncle must have been when the doctor took off his limb. Here the children fell a-crying, and asked if their little mourning which they had on was not for uncle John, and they looked up, and prayed me not to go on about their uncle, but to tell them some stories about their pretty dead mother. Then I told how for seven long years, in hope sometimes, sometimes in despair, yet persisting ever, I courted the fair Alice W—n; and, as much as children could understand, I explained to them what coyness, and difficulty, and denial meant in maidens—when suddenly, turning to Alice, the soul of the first Alice looked out at her eyes with such a reality of representment, that I became in doubt which of them stood their before me, or whose that bright hair was; and while I stood gazing, both the children gradually grew fainter to my view, receding, and still receding till nothing at last but two mournful features were seen in the uttermost distance, which without speech, strangely impressed upon me the effects of speech : ‘We are not of Alice, nor of thee, nor are

we children at all. The children of Alice called Bartrum father. We are nothing; less than nothing, and dreams. We are only what might have been, and must wait upon the tedious shores of Lethe millions of ages before we have existence, and a name'—and immediately awaking, I found myself quietly seated in my bachelor arm-chair, where I had fallen asleep, with the faithful Bridget unchanged by my side—but John L. (or James Elia) was gone forever.

PERSONAL STYLE

J. A. SYMONDS

A survey of language, however superficial, makes it evident that when we speak of style, we have to take into account those qualities of national character which are embodied in national speech. If two men could be born of precisely the same physical, mental and moral nature, at precisely the same moment of history, and under precisely the same social conditions; and if these men learned different languages in the cradle, and used those languages in after life, they would be unable to deliver exactly the same message to the world through literature. The dominant qualities of each mother tongue would impose definite limitations on their power of expressing thoughts, however similar or identical those thoughts might be.

We cannot conceive two men born with the same physical, mental and moral nature, at the same moment, under precisely the same conditions, and using the same language. They would be identical; and everything they uttered would be clothed with exactly the same words. The absurdity of this conception brings home to us the second aspect of style. Style is not merely a sign of those national qualities which are generic to established languages, and which constitute the so-called genius of a race. It is also the sign of personal qualities, specific to individuals, which constitute the genius of a man. Whatever a man utters from his heart and head is the index of his character. The more remarkable a person is, the more strongly he is differentiated from the average of human beings, the more salient will be the characteristic notes of his expression. But even the commonest people have, each of them, a specific style. The marks of difference become microscopical as we descend from Dante or Shakespeare to the drudges of the clerk's desk in one of our great cities. Yet these marks exist, and are no less significant

of individuality than the variations between leaf and leaf upon the lime trees of an avenue.

It may be asked whether the manner of expression peculiar to any person is a complete index to his character — whether, in other words, there is ‘an art to find the mind’s construction’ in the style. Not altogether and exhaustively. Not all the actions and the utterances of an individual betray the secret of his personality. You may live with men and women through years, by day, by night, yet you will never know the whole about them. No human being knows the whole about himself.

The deliberate attitude adopted by a literary writer implies circumspection; invites suppression, reservation, selection, is compatible with affectation, dissimulation, hypocrisy. So much cannot be claimed for critical analysis as that we should pretend to reproduce a man’s soul after close examination of his work. What we may assert with confidence is that the qualities of style are intimately connected with the qualities and limitations of the writer, and teach us much about him. He wrote thus and thus, because he was this or this. In the exercise of style it is impossible for anyone to transcend his inborn and acquired faculties of ideation, imagination, sense-perception, verbal expression—just as it is impossible in the exercise of strength for an athlete to transcend the limits of his physical structure, powers of innervation, dexterity, and courage¹. The work of art produced by a writer is therefore, of necessity, complexioned and determined by the inborn and acquired faculties of the individual. This is what we mean by the hackneyed epigram : ‘*Le style c’est l’ homme*’.

II

Certain broad distinctions of moral and emotional temperament may undoubtedly be detected in literary style. A tendency towards exaggeration, toward self-revelation, toward emphasis upon the one side; a tendency to reserve, to diminished tone in colouring, to parsimony of rhetorical resource upon the

other; these indicate expansiveness or reticence in the writer. Victor Hugo differs by the breadth of the whole heavens from Leopardi. One man is ironical by nature, another sentimental. Sterne and Heine have a common gift of humour; but the quality of humour in each case is conditioned by sympathetic or by caustic undercurrents of emotion. Sincerity and affectation, gaiety and melancholy, piety and scepticism, austerity and sensuality penetrate style so subtly and unmistakably that a candid person cannot pose as the mere slave of convention, a boon companion cannot pass muster for an anchorite, the founder of a religious sect cannot play the part of an agnostic. In dramatic work the artist creates characters alien from his own personality, and exhibits people widely different from himself acting and talking as they ought to do. This he achieves by sympathy and intuition. Yet all except the very greatest fail to render adequately what they have not felt and been. In playwrights of the second order, like our Fletcher, or of the third order, like our Byron, the individual who writes the tragedy and shapes the characters is always apparent under every mask he chooses to assume. And even the style of the greatest, their manner of presenting the varieties of human nature, betrays individual peculiarities. Aeschylus sees men and women differently from Sophocles, Corneille from Racine, Shakespeare from Goethe.

In like manner the broad distinctions of mental temperament may be traced in style. The abstract thinker differs from the concrete thinker in his choice of terms; the analytical from the synthetic; the ratiocinative from the intuitive; the logical from the imaginative; the scientific from the poetical. One man thinks in images, another in formal propositions. One is diffuse, and gets his thought out by reiterated statement. Another makes epigrams, and finds some difficulty in expanding their sense or throwing light upon them by illustrations. One arrives at conclusions by the way of argument. Another clothes assertion with the tropes and metaphors of rhetoric.

The same is true of physical and aesthetical qualities. They are felt inevitably in style. The sedentary student does not use the same figures of speech as come naturally to the muscular and active lover of field sports. According as the sense for colour, or for sound, or for light, or for form shall preponderate in a writer's constitution, his language will abound in references to the world, viewed under conditions of colour, sound, light or form. He will insensibly dwell upon those aspects of things which stimulate his sensibility and haunt his memory. Thus too, predilections for sea or mountains, for city-life or rural occupations, for flowers, precious stones, scents, birds, animals, insects, different kinds of food, torrid or temperate climates, leave their mark on literary style.

Acquired faculties and habits find their expression in style no less than inborn qualities. Education, based upon humanism or scientific studies; contact with powerful personalities at an impressible period of youth; enthusiasm aroused for this or that great masterpiece of literature; social environment; high or low birth; professional training for the bar, the church, medicine, or commerce; life in the army, at sea, upon a farm, and so forth, tinge the mind and give a more or less perceptible colour to language.

The use of words itself yields, upon analysis, valuable results illustrative of the various temperaments of authors. A man's vocabulary marks him out as of this sort of that sort—his preference for certain syntactical forms, for short sentences or for periods, for direct or inverted propositions, for plain or figurative statement, for brief or amplified illustrations. Some compose sentences, but do not build paragraphs—like Emerson; some write chapters, but cannot construct a book. Nor is punctuation to be disregarded, inasmuch as stops enable us to measure a writer's sense of time-values, and the importance he attaches to several degrees of rest and pause.

III

It is impossible to do more than indicate some of the leading

points which illustrate the meaning of the saying that style is the man; anyone can test them and apply them for himself. We not only feel that Walter Scott did not write like Thackeray, but we also know that he could not write like Thackeray, and vice versa. This impossibility of one man producing work in exactly the same manner as another makes all deliberate attempts at limitation assume the form of parody or caricature. The sacrifice of individuality involved in scrupulous addiction to one great master of Latin prose, Cicero, condemned the best stylists of the Renaissance—men like Muretus—to lifeless and eventually worthless production. Meanwhile the exact psychology is wanting which would render our intuitions regarding the indissoluble link between style and personal character irrefutable.

Literary style is more a matter of sentiment, emotion, involuntary habits of feeling and observing, constitutional sympathy with the world and men, tendencies of curiosity and liking, than of the pure intellect. The style of scientific works, affording little scope for the exercise of these psychological elements, throws less light upon their authors' temperament than does the style of poems, novels, essays, books of travel, descriptive criticism. In the former case all that need be aimed at is lucid exposition of fact and vigorous reasoning. In the latter, the fact to be stated, the truth to be arrived at, being of a more complex nature, involves a process akin to that of the figurative arts. The stylist has here to produce the desired effect by suggestions of infinite subtlety, and to present impressions made upon his sensibility.

Autobiographies, epistolary correspondence, notes of table-talk, are of the highest value in determining the correlation between a writer's self and his style. We not only derive a mass of information about Goethe's life from Eckermann, but we also discover from those conversations in how true a sense the style of Goethe's work grew out of his temperament and experience. Gibbon and Rousseau, Alfieri and Goldoni, Samuel Johnson in

his Life by Boswell, John Stuart Mill in his autobiographical essay, Petrarch in his *Secretum* and fragment of personal confessions, have placed similar keys within our reach for unlocking the secret of their several manners.

The rare cases in which men of genius have excelled in more than one branch of art are no less instructive. Michelangelo the sonnet-writer helps us to understand Michelangelo the sculptor. Rossetti the painter throws light on Rossetti the poet; William Blake the lyrist upon William Blake the draughtsman. We find on comparing the double series of work offered by such eminent and exceptionally gifted individuals, that their styles in literature and plastic art possess common qualities, which mark the men and issue from their personalities. Michelangelo in the sonnets is as abstract, as ideal, as form-loving as indifferent to the charm of brilliant colour, as neglectful of external nature as Michelangelo in his statues and the frescoes of the Sistine Chapel. Rossetti's pictures, with their wealth of colour, their elaborate execution, their sharp incisive vision, their deep imaginative mysticism and powerful perfume of intellectual sensuousness, present a close analogue to his ballads, sonnets, and descriptive poems. With these and similar instances in our mind, we are prepared to hear that Victor Hugo designed pictures in the style of Gustave Dore; nor would it surprise us to discover that Gustava Dore had left odes or fiction in the manner of Victor Hugo.

The problems suggested by style as a sign and index of personality may be approached from many points of view. I have not aimed at exhaustiveness even of suggestion in my treatment of the topic; and while saying much which will appear perhaps trivial and obvious, have omitted some of the subtler and more interesting aspects of the matter. A systematic criticism of personal style would require a volume, and would demand physiological and psychological knowledge which is rarely found in combination with an extensive study of literatures and arts.

FREEDOM

G. B. SHAW

What is a perfectly free person? Evidently a person who can do what he likes, when he likes and where he likes, or do nothing at all if he prefers it. Well, there is no such person, and there never can be any such person. Whether we like it or not, we must all sleep for one third of our lifetime—wash and dress and undress—we must spend a couple of hours eating and drinking—we must spend nearly as much in getting about from place to place. For half the day we are slaves to necessities which we cannot shirk, whether we are monarchs with a thousand slaves or humble labourers with no servants but their wives. And the wives must undertake the additional heavy slavery of child-bearing, if the world is still to be peopled.

These natural jobs cannot be shirked. But they involve other jobs which can. As we must eat, we must first provide food; as we must sleep, we must have beds, and bedding in houses with fireplaces and coals; as we must walk through the streets, we must have clothes to cover our nakedness. Now, food and houses and clothes can be produced by human labour. But when they are produced they can be stolen. If you like honey you can let the bees produce it by their labour, and then steal it from them. If you are too lazy to get about from place to place on your own legs you can make a slave of a horse. And what you do to a horse or a bee, you can also do to a man or woman or a child, if you can get the upper hand of them by force or fraud or trickery of any sort, or even by teaching them that it is their religious duty to sacrifice their freedom to yours.

So beware! If you allow any person, or class of persons, to get the upper hand of you, he will shift all that part of his slavery to Nature that can be shifted on to your shoulders; and you will find yourself working from eight to fourteen hours a day when, if you had only yourself and your family to provide

for, you could do it quite comfortably in half the time or less. The object of all honest governments should be to prevent your being imposed on in this way. But the object of most actual governments, I regret to say, is exactly the opposite. They enforce your slavery and call it freedom. But they also regulate your slavery, keeping the greed of your masters within certain bounds. When chattel slavery of the negro sort costs more than wage slavery, they abolish chattel slavery and make you free to choose between one employment or one master and another, and this they call a glorious triumph for freedom, though for you it is merely the key of the street. When you complain, they promise that in future you shall govern the country for yourself. They redeem this promise by giving you a vote, and having a general election every five years or so.

At the election two of their rich friends ask for your vote, and you are free to choose which of them you will vote for to spite the other—a choice which leaves you no freer than you were before, as it does not reduce your hours of labour by a single minute. But the newspapers assure you that your vote has decided the election and that this constitutes you a free citizen in a democratic country. The amazing thing about it is that you are fool enough to believe them.

Now mark another big difference between the natural slavery of man to Nature and the unnatural slavery of man to man. Nature is kind to her slaves. If she forces you to eat and drink, she makes eating and drinking so pleasant that when we can afford it we eat and drink too much. We must sleep or go mad: but then sleep is so pleasant that we have great difficulty in getting up in the morning. And firesides and families seem so pleasant to the young that they get married and join building societies to realize their dreams. Thus, instead of resenting our natural wants as slavery, we take the greatest pleasure in their satisfaction. We write sentimental songs in praise of them. A tramp can earn his supper by singing *Home, Sweet Home*.

The slavery of man to man is the very opposite of this. It

is hateful to the body and to the spirit. Our poets do not praise it: they proclaim that no man is good enough to be another man's master. The latest of the great Jewish prophets, a gentleman named Marx, spent his life in proving that there is no extremity of selfish cruelty at which the slavery of man to man will stop if it be not stopped by law. You can see for yourself that it produces a state of continual civil war—called the class war—between the slaves and their masters, organized as Trade Unions on one side and Employers' Federations on the other. Saint Thomas More, who has just been canonized, held that we shall never have a peaceful and stable society until this struggle is ended by the abolition of slavery altogether, and the compulsion of everyone to do his share of the world's work with his own hands and brains, and not to attempt to put it on anyone else.

Naturally the master class, through its parliaments and schools and newspapers, makes the most desperate efforts to prevent us from realizing our slavery. From our earliest years we are taught that our country is the land of the free, and that our freedom was won for us by our forefathers when they made King John sign the Magna Charta—when they defeated the Spanish Armada—when they cut off King Charles' head—when they made King William accept the Bill of Rights—when they issued and made good the American Declaration of Independence—when they won the Battles of Waterloo and Trafalgar on the playing-fields of Eton—and when, only the other day, they quite unintentionally changed the German, Austrian, Russian, and Ottoman empires into republics.

When we grumble, we are told that all our miseries are our own doing because we have the vote. When we say 'What good is the vote?' we are told that we have the Factory Acts, and the Wages Boards, and free education, and New Deal, and the dole; and what more could any reasonable man ask for? We are reminded that the rich are taxed a quarter—a third—or even a half and more of their incomes; but the poor are never

reminded that they have to pay that much of their wages as rent in addition to having to work twice as long every day as they would need if they were free.

Whenever famous writers protest against this imposture—say Voltaire and Rousseau and Tom Paine in the eighteenth century, or Cobbett and Shelley, Karl Marx and Lassalle in the nineteenth, or Lenin and Trotsky in the twentieth—you are taught that they are atheists and libertines, murderers and scoundrels; and often it is made a criminal offence to buy or sell their books. If their disciples make a revolution, England immediately makes war on them and lends money to the other powers to join her in forcing the revolutionists to restore the slave order. When this combination was successful at Waterloo, the victory was advertised as another triumph for British freedom; and the British wage-slaves, instead of going into mourning like Lord Byron, believed it all and cheered enthusiastically. When the revolution wins, as it did in Russia in 1922, the fighting stops; but the abuse, the calumnies, the lies continue until the revolutionized State grows into a first-rate military Power. Then our diplomatists, after having for years denounced the revolutionary leaders as the most abominable villains and tyrants, have to do a right turn and invite them to dinner.

Now, though this prodigious mass of humbug is meant to delude the enslaved masses only, it ends in deluding the master class much more completely. A gentleman whose mind has been formed at a preparatory school for the sons of gentlemen, followed by a public school and university course, is much more thoroughly taken in by the falsified history and dishonest political economy and the snobbery taught in these places than any worker can possibly be, because the gentleman's education teaches him that he is a very fine fellow, superior to the common run of men whose duty it is to brush his clothes, carry his parcels, and earn his income for him; and as he thoroughly agrees with this view of himself, he honestly believes that the

system which has placed him in such an agreeable situation and done such justice to his merits is the best of all possible systems, and that he should shed his blood, and yours, to the last drop in its defence. But the great mass of our rack-rented, underpaid, treated-as-inferiors, cast-off-on-the-dole workers cannot feel so sure about it as the gentleman. The facts are too harshly against it. In hard times, such as we are now passing through, their disgust and despair sometimes lead them to kick over the traces, upset everything, and they have to be rescued from mere gangsterism by some Napoleonic genius who has a fancy for being an emperor, and who has the courage and brains and energy to jump at the chance. But the slaves who give three cheers for the emperor might just as well have made a cross on a British or American ballot paper as far as their freedom is concerned.

So far I have mentioned nothing but plain natural and historical facts. I draw no conclusions, for that would lead me into controversy, and controversy would not be fair when you cannot answer me back. I am never controversial over the wireless. I do not even ask you to draw your own conclusions, for you might draw some very dangerous ones, unless you have the right sort of head for it. Always remember that though nobody likes to be called a slave, it does not follow that slavery is a bad thing. Great men, like Aristotle, have held that the law and order and government would be impossible unless the persons the people have to obey are beautifully dressed and decorated, robed and uniformed, speaking with a special accent, travelling in first class carriages or the most expensive cars, or in the best-groomed and best-bred horses, and never cleaning their own boots, not doing anything for themselves that can possibly be done by ringing a bell and ordering some common person to do it. And this means, of course, that they must be made very rich without any obligation other than to produce an impression of almost godlike superiority on the minds of common people. In short, it is contended, you must make men

ignorant idolaters before they will become obedient workers and law-abiding citizens.

To prove this, we are reminded that, although nine out of ten voters are common workers, it is with the greatest difficulty that a few of them can be persuaded to vote for the members of their own class. When women were enfranchised and given the right to sit in Parliament, the first use they made of their votes was to defeat all the women candidates who stood for the freedom of the workers and had given them years of devoted and distinguished service. They elected only one woman—a titled lady of great wealth and exceptionally fascinating personality.

Now this, it is said, in human nature, and you cannot change human nature. On the other hand, it is maintained that human nature is the easiest thing in the world to change if you catch it young enough, and that the idolatry of the slave class and the arrogance of the master class are themselves entirely artificial products of education and of a propaganda that plays upon our infants long before they have left their cradles. An opposite mentality could, it is argued, be produced by a contrary education and propaganda. You can turn the point over in your mind for yourself; do not let me prejudice you one way or the other.

The practical question at the bottom of it all is how the income of the whole country can best be distributed from day to day. If the earth is cultivated agriculturally in vast farms with motor ploughs and chemical fertilizers, and industrially in huge electrified factories full of machinery that a girl can handle, the product may be so great that an equal distribution of it would provide enough to give the unskilled labourers as much as the managers and the men of the scientific staff. But do not forget, when you hear tales of modern machinery enabling one girl to produce as much as a thousand men could produce in the reign of good Queen Anne, that this marvellous increase includes things like needles and steel pins and matches, which

we can neither eat nor drink nor wear. Very young children will eat needles and matches eagerly—but the diet is not a nourishing one. And though we can now cultivate the sky as well as the earth, by drawing nitrogen from it to increase and improve the quality of our grass and, consequently, of our cattle and milk and butter and eggs, Nature may have tricks up her sleeve to check us if the chemists exploit her too greedily.

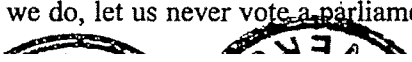
And now to sum up. Wipe out from your dreams of freedom the hope of being able to do as you please all the time. For at least twelve hours of your day Nature orders you to do certain things, and will kill you if you don't do them. This leaves twelve hours for working; and here again Nature will kill you unless you either earn your living or get somebody else to earn it for you. If you live in a civilized country your freedom is restricted by the laws of the land enforced by the police, who oblige you to do this, and not to do that, and to pay rates and taxes. If you do not obey these laws the courts will imprison you, and, if you go too far kill you. If the laws are reasonable and are impartially administered you have no reason to complain, because they increase your freedom by protecting you against assault, highway robbery, and disorder generally.

But as society is constituted at present, there is another far more intimate compulsion on you : that of your landlord and that of your employer. Your landlord may refuse to let you live on his estate if you go to chapel instead of to church, or if you vote for anyone but his nominee, or if you practise osteopathy, or if you open a shop. Your employer may dictate the cut, colour, and condition of your clothes, as well as your hours of work. He can turn you into the street at any moment to join the melancholy band of lost spirits called the Unemployed. In short, his power over you is far greater than that of any political dictator could possibly be. Your only remedy at present is the trade Union weapon of the strike, which is only the old Oriental device of starving on your enemy's doorstep until he does you justice. Now, as the police, in this country will not

allow you to starve on your employer's doorstep, you must starve on your own—if you have one. The extreme form of the strike—the general strike of all workers at the same moment—is also the extreme form of human folly, as, if completely carried out, it would extinguish the human race in a week. And the workers would be the first to perish. The general strike is Trade Unionism gone mad. Sane Trade Unionism would never sanction more than one big strike at a time, with all the other trades working overtime to support it.

Now let us put the case in figures. If you have to work for twelve hours a day you have four hours a day to do what you like with, subject to the laws of the land, and your possession of money enough to buy an interesting book or pay for a seat at the pictures, or, on a half-holiday, at a football match, or whatever your fancy may be. But even here Nature will interfere a good deal, for, if your eight hours work has been of a hard physical kind, and when you get home you want to spend your four hours in reading my books to improve your mind, you will find yourself fast asleep in half a minute, and your mind will remain in its present benighted condition.

I take it, then, that nine out of ten of us desire more freedom and that is why we listen to wireless talks about it. As long as we go on as we are—content with a vote and a dole—the only advice we can give one another is that of Shakespeare's Iago : 'Put money in thy purse'. But as we get very little money into our purses on pay-day, and all the rest of the week other people are taking money out of it, Iago's advice is not very practical. We must change our politics before we can get what we want; and meanwhile we must stop gassing about freedom, because the people of England in the lump don't know what freedom is, never having had any. Always call freedom by its old English name of leisure, and keep clamoring for more leisure and more money to enjoy it in return for an honest share of work. And let us stop singing Rule, Britannia! until we make it true. Until we do, let us never vote a parliamentary candidate



who talks about our freedom and our love of liberty, for, whatever political name he may give himself, he is sure to beat bottom an Anarchist who wants to live on our labour without being taken up by the police for it as he deserves.

And now suppose we at last win a lot more leisure and a lot more money than we are accustomed to. What are we going to do with them? I was taught in my childhood that Satan will find mischief still for idle hands to do. I have seen men come into a fortune and lose their happiness, their health, and finally their lives by it as certainly as if they had taken daily doses of rat poison instead of champagne and cigars. It is not at all easy to know what to do with leisure unless we have been brought up to it.

I will therefore leave you with a conundrum to think over. If you had your choice, would you work for eight hours a day and retire with a full pension at forty-five, or would you rather work four hours a day and keep on working until you are seventy? Now, don't send the answer to me, please : talk it over with your wife.

SCIENCE AND WAR

J. BRONOWSKI

The sense of doom in us today is not a fear of science; it is a fear of war. And the causes of war were not created by science. No, science has not invented war; but it has turned it into a very different thing. Science has enlarged the mechanism of war, and it has distorted it. It has done this in at least two ways.

First, science has obviously multiplied the power of the war-makers. The weapons of the moment can kill more people more secretly and more unpleasantly than those of the past. This progress, as for want of another word I must call it—this progress has been going on for some time; and for some time it has been said, of each new weapon, that it is so destructive or so horrible that it will frighten people into their wits, and force the nations to give up war for lack of cannon fodder. This hope has never been fulfilled, and I know no one who takes refuge in it today. The acts of men and women are not dictated by such simple compulsions; and they themselves do not stand in any simple relation to the decision of the nations which they compose. Grapeshot and TNT and gas have not helped to outlaw war; and I see no sign that the hydrogen bomb or a whiff of bacteria will be more successful in making men wise by compulsion.

Secondly, science at the same time has given nations quite new occasions for falling out. I do not mean such simple objectives as someone else's uranium or a Pacific Island which happens to be kneedeep in organic fertiliser. I do not even merely mean another nation's factories and her skilled population. These are all parts of the surplus above our simple needs which they themselves help to create and which gives our civilisation its character. And war in our world battens on this surplus. This is the object of the greed of nations, and this

also gives them the leisure to train and the means to arm for war. At bottom, we have remained individually too greedy to distribute our surplus and collectively too stupid to pile it up in any more useful form than the traditional mountains of arms. Science can claim to have created the surplus in our societies, and we know from the working day how greatly it has increased in the last two hundred years. Science has created the surplus. Now put this year's budget beside the budget of 1750, anywhere in the world, and you will see what we are doing with it.

I myself think there is a third dimension which science had added to modern war. It has created war nerves and the war on nerves. I am not thinking about the technical conditions for a war on nerves; the camera man and the radio and the massed display of strength. I am thinking of the climate in which this stage lightning flickers and is made to seem real. The last twenty years have given us a frightening show of these mental states. There is a division in the mind of each of us, that has become plain, between the man and the brute; and the rift can be opened, the man submerged, with a cynical simplicity, with the meanest tools of envy and frustration, which in my boyhood would have been thought inconceivable in a civilised society. I shall come back to this cleavage in our minds, for it is so much more than an item in a list of war crimes. But it is an item. It helps to create the conditions for disaster. And I think that science has contributed to it. Science : the fact that science is there, mysterious, powerful; the fact that most people are impressed by it but ignorant and helpless—all this seems to me to have contributed to the division in our minds. And scientists cannot escape the responsibility for this. They have enjoyed acting the mysterious stranger, the powerful voice without emotion, the expert and the God. They have failed to make themselves comfortable in the talk of people in the street; no one taught them the knack, of course, but they were not keen to learn. And now they find the distance which they enjoyed has turned to distrust, and the awe has turned to fear; and people

who are by no means fools really believe that we should be better off without science.

These are the indictments which scientists cannot escape. Why is it the business of no one in particular to stop fitting science for death and to begin fitting it into our lives ? We will agree that warlike science is no more than a by-product of a warlike society. Science has merely provided the means, for good or for bad; and society has seized it for bad. But what are we going to do about it?

There are no panaceas at all; and we had better face that. There is nothing that we can do overnight, in a week or a month, which can straighten by a laying-on of hands the ancient distortion of our society.

Meanwhile we had better settle down to work for our ultimate survival; and we had better start now. We have seen that the diagnosis has turned out to be not very difficult. Science and our social habits are out of step. And the cure is no deeper either. We must learn to match them. And there is no way of learning this unless we learn to understand both.

We may think that all that science has created is comfort; and it certainly has done that—the very word ‘comfortable’ in this modern sense dates from the Industrial Revolution. But have we always stopped to think what science has done not to our mode of living but to our life ? We talk about research for death, the threat of war and the number of civilians who get killed. But have we always weighed this against the increase in our own life span ? Let us do a small sum. The number of people killed in Great Britain in six years of war by German bombs, flying bombs and V2’s was sixty thousand. They were an average lot of people, which means that on an average they lost half their expectation of life. Quite an easy long division shows that the effect of this on our population of fifty million people was to shorten the average span of life by less than one tenth of one percent. This is considerably less than a fortnight. Put this on the debit side. And on the credit side, we know

that in the last hundred years the average span of life in England has increased by twenty years. That is the price of science, take it or leave it—a fortnight for twenty years of life. And these twenty years have been created by applying to daily life, to clothing and bedding, to hygiene and infection, to birth and death, the simple ideas of science—the fundamental ideas I have been talking about : order, cause and chance. If any ideas have a claim to be called creative, because they have created life, it is the ideas of science.

TO THE SKYLARK

W. WORDSWORTH

Ethereal minstrel! pilgrim of the sky!
Dost thou despise the earth where cares abound?
Or while the wings aspire, are heart and eye
Both with thy nest upon the dewy ground ?
Thy nest which thou canst drop into at will,
Those quivering wings composed, that music still!

To the last point of vision, and beyond
Mount, daring warbler!—that love-prompted strain
—‘Twixt thee and thine a never-failing bond—
Thrills not the less the bosom of the plain:
Yet might'st thou seem, proud privilege! to sing
All independent of the leafy Spring

Leave to the nightingale her shady wood;
A privacy of glorious light is thine,
Whence thou dost pour upon the world a flood
Of harmony, with instinct more divine;
Type of the wise, who soar, but never roam—
True to the kindred points of Heaven and Home!

LA BELLE DAME SANS MERCI

J. KEATS

'O What can ail thee, knight-at-arms,
Alone and palely loitering?
The sedge has wither'd from the lake,
And no birds sing.

'O what can ail thee, knight-at arms!
So haggard and so woebegone?
The squirrel's granary is full,
And the harvest's done.

'I see a lily on thy brow
With anguish moist and fever-dew,
And on thy cheeks a fading rose
Fast withereth too.'

'I met a lady in the meads,
Full beautiful—a fairy's child,
Her hair was long, her foot was light,
And her eyes were wild.

'I made a garland for her head,
And bracelets too, and fragrant zone;
She look'd at me as she did love,
And made sweet moan.

'I set her on my pacing steed
And nothing else saw all day long,
For sidelong would she bend, and sing
A fairy's song.

'She found me roots of relish sweet;
And honey wild and manna-dew,
And sure in language strange she said
"I love thee true"

'She took me to her elfin grot,
And there she wept, and sigh'd full sore
And there I shut her wild wild eyes
With kisses four.

'And there she lulled me asleep,
And there I dream'd—Ah! woe betide!
The latest dream I ever dream'd
On the cold hill's side.

'I saw pale kings and princes too,
Pale warriors, death-pale were they all;
They cried—"La belle Dame sans Merci
Hath thee in thrall !"

'I saw their starved lips in the gloam
With horrid warning gaped wide,
And I awoke and found me here
On the cold hill's side.

'And this is why I sojourn here
Alone and palely loitering,
Though the sedge is wither'd from the lake
And no birds sing.'

ULYSSES

LORD (ALFRED) TENNYSON

It little profits that an idle king,
By this still hearth, among these barren crags,
Match'd with an aged wife, I mete and dole
Unequal laws unto a savage race,
That hoard, and sleep, and feed, and know not me.

I cannot rest from travel : I will drink
Life to the lees : all times I have enjoy'd
Greatly, have suffer'd greatly, both with those
That loved me, and alone; on shore, and when
Thro' scudding drifts the rainy Hyades

Vext the dim sea : I am become a name;
For always roaming with a hungry heart
Much have I seen and known; cities of men
And manners, climates, councils, governments,
Myself not least, but honour'd of them all;

And drunk delight of battle with my peers,
Far on the ringing plains of windy Troy.
I am a part of all that I have met;
Yet all experience is an arch wherethro'
Gleams that untravell'd world, whose margin fades
For ever and for ever when I move.

How dull it is to pause, to make an end,
To rust unburnish'd, not to shine in use!
As tho' to breathe were life. Life piled on life
Were all too little, and of one to me

Little remains : but every hour is saved
From that eternal silence, something more,
A bringer of new things; and vile it were
For some three suns to store and hoard myself,
And this gray spirit yearning in desire

To follow knowledge, like a sinking star,
Beyond the utmost bound of human thought.
This is my son, mine own Telemachus,
To whom I leave the sceptre and the isle—
Well-loved of me, discerning to fulfil

This labour, by slow prudence to make mild
A rugged people, and thro' soft degrees
Subdue them to the useful and the good.
Most blameless is he, centred in the sphere
Of common duties, decent not to fail

In offices of tenderness, and pay
Meet adoration to my household gods
When I am gone. He works his work, I mine.
There lies the port : the vessel puffs her sail
There gloom the dark broad seas. My mariners

Souls that have toil'd, and wrought—and thought with me
That ever with a frolic welcome took
The thunder and the sunshine, and opposed
Free hearts, free foreheads—you and I are old
Old age hath yet his honour and his toil;

Death closes all : but something ere the end,
Some work of noble note, may yet be done
Not unbecoming men that strove with Gods.
The lights begin to twinkle from the rocks
The long day wanes : the slow moon climbs : the deep

Moans round with many voices. Come my friends,
'Tis not too late to seek a newer world
Push off, and sitting well in order smite
The sounding furrows; for my purpose holds
To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths

Of all the western stars, until I die.
It may be that the gulfs will wash us down:
It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles,
And see the great Achilles, whom we knew.
Tho' much is taken, much abides; and tho'

We are not now that strength which in old days
Moved earth and heaven ; that which we are, we are;
One equal temper of heroic hearts,
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

DOVER BEACH

M. ARNOLD

The sea is calm to-night.
The tide is full, the moon lies fair
Upon the straits; — on the French coast the light
Gleams and is gone; the cliffs of England stand,
Glimmering and vast, out in the tranquil bay.
Come to the window, sweet is the night-air!
Only, from the long line of spray
Where the sea meets the moon-blanch'd land,
Listen! you hear the grating roar
Of pebbles which the waves draw back, and fling,
At their return, up the high strand,
Begin, and cease, and then again begin,
With tremulous cadence slow, and bring
The eternal note of sadness in.

Sophocles long ago
Heard it on the AEgean, and it brought
Into his mind the turbid ebb and flow
Of human misery; we
Find also in the sound a thought,
Hearing it by this distant northern sea.

The Sea of Faith
Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furl'd.

But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
Retreating, to the breath
Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear
And naked shingles of the world.

Ah, love, let us be true
To one another! for the world, which seems
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night.

STRANGE MEETING

WILFRED OWEN

It seemed that out of battle I escaped
Down some profound dull tunnel, long since scooped
Through granites which titanic wars had groined.
Yet also there encumbered sleepers groaned,
Too fast in thought or death to be bestirred.
Then, as I probed them, one sprang up, and stared
With pitiful recognition in fixed eyes,
Lifting distressful hands as if to bless.
And by his smile, I know that sullen hall,
By his dead smile I knew we stood in Hell.
With a thousand pains that vision's face was grained
Yet no blood reached there from the upper ground,
And no guns thumped, or down the flues made moan.
'Strange friend', I said, 'here is no cause to mourn.'
'None', said the other, 'save the undone years,
The hopelessness. Whatever hope is yours,
Was my life, also : I went hunting wild
After the wildest beauty in the world,
Which lie not calm in eyes, or braided hair,
But mocks the steady running of the hour,
And if it grieves grivers richer than here.
For by my glee might many men have laughed,
And of my weeping something had been left,
Which must die now. I mean the truth untold,
The pity of war, the pity war distilled.

Now men will go content with what we spoiled.
Or, discontent, boil bloody, and be spilled.
They will be swift with swiftness of the tigress,
None will break ranks, though nations trek from progress.
Courage was mine, and I had mystery,
Wisdom was mine, and I had mastery;
To miss the march of this retreating world
Into vain citadels that are not walled.
Then, when much blood had clogged their chariot-wheels
I would go up and wash them from sweet wells,
Even with truths that lie too deep for taint.
I would have poured my spirit without stint
But not through wounds; not on the cess of war.
Foreheads of men have bled where no wound were.
I am the enemy you killed, my friend.
I knew you in this dark; for so you frowned
Yesterday through me as you jabbed and killed.
I parried; but my hands were loath and cold.
Let us sleep now...'

PIED BEAUTY

HOPKINS

Glory be to God for dappled things—

For skies of couple-colour as a brinded cow;
For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;
Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches' wings;
Landscape plotted and pieced—fold, fallow, and plough,
And all trades, their gear and tackle and trim.

All things counter, original, spare, strange :
Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how ?)
With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;
He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change :
Praise him.

THE LOTUS EATER

W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM

Most people, the vast majority in fact, lead the lives that circumstances have thrust upon them, and though some repine, looking upon themselves as round pegs in square holes,¹ and think that if things had been different they might have made a much better showing, the greater part accept their lot, if not with serenity, at all events with resignation. They are like tram-cars travelling for ever on the selfsame rails: They go backwards and forwards, backwards and forwards, inevitably, till they can go no longer and then are sold as scrap-iron. It is not often that you find a man who has boldly taken the course of his life into his own hands. When you do, it is worth while having a good look at him.

That was why I was curious to meet Thomas Wilson. It was an interesting and a bold thing he had done. Of course the end was not yet and until the experiment was concluded it was impossible to call it successful. But from what I had heard it seemed he must be an odd sort of fellow and I thought I should like to know him. I had been told he was reserved, but I had a notion that with patience and tact I could persuade him to confide in me. I wanted to hear the facts from his own lips. People exaggerate, they love to romanticize, and I was quite prepared to discover that his story was not nearly so singular as I had been led to believe.

And this impression was confirmed when at last I made his acquaintance. It was on the Piazza in Capri, where I was spending the month of August at a friend's villa, and a little before sunset, when most of the inhabitants, native and foreign, gather together to chat with their friends in the cool of the evening. There is a terrace that overlooks the Bay of Naples, and when the sun sinks slowly into the sea the island of Ischia is silhouetted against a blaze of splendour. It is one of the most lovely sights in the world. I was standing there with my friend and host watching it, when suddenly he said :

'Look, there's Wilson.'

'Where?'

'The man sitting on the parapet, with his back to us. He's got a blue shirt on.'

I saw an undistinguished back and a small head of grey hair short and rather thin.

'I wish he'd turn round,' I said.

'He will presently'

'Ask him to come and have a drink with us at Morgano's.'

'All right'

The instant of overwhelming beauty had passed and the sun, like the top of an orange, was dipping into a wine-red sea. We turned round and leaning our backs against the parapet looked at the people who were sauntering to and fro. They were all talking their heads off² and the cheerful noise was exhilarating. Then the church bell, rather cracked, but with a fine resonant note, began to ring. The Piazza at Capri, with its clock tower over the footpath that leads up from the harbour, with the church up a flight of steps, is a perfect setting for an opera by Donizetti, and you felt that the voluble crowd might at any moment break out into a rattling chorus. It was charming and unreal.

I was so intent on the scene that I had not noticed Wilson get off the parapet and come towards us. As he passed us my friend stopped him.

'Hulloa, Wilson, I haven't seen you bathing the last few days.'

'I 've been bathing on the other side for a change.'

My friend then introduced me. Wilson shook hands with me politely, but with indifference; a great many strangers come to Capri for a few days, or a few weeks, and I had no doubt he was constantly meeting people who came and went; and then my friend asked him to come along and have a drink with us.

'I was just going back to supper,' he said.

'Can't it wait?' I asked.

'I suppose it can,' he smiled.

Though his teeth were not very good his smile was attractive. It was gentle and kindly. He was dressed in a blue cotton shirt and a pair of grey trousers, much creased and none too clean, of a thin canvas, and on his feet he wore a pair of very old espadrilles. The get-up was picturesque, and very suitable to the place and the weather, but it did not at all go with his face. It was lined, long face, deeply sunburned, thin-lipped, with small grey eyes rather close together and tight, neat features. The grey hair was carefully brushed. It was not a plain face, indeed in his youth Wilson might have been good-looking, but a prim one. He wore the blue shirt, open at the neck, and the grey canvas trousers, not as though they belonged to him, but as though, shipwrecked in his pyjamas, he had been fitted out with odd garments by compassionate strangers. Notwithstanding this careless attire he looked like the manager of a branch office in an Insurance company, who should by rights be wearing a black coat with pepper-and-salt trousers, a white collar and an unobjectionable tie. I could very well see myself going to him to claim the insurance money when I had lost a watch, and being rather disconcerted while I answered the questions he put to me by his obvious impression, for all his politeness, that people who made such claims were either fools or knaves.

Moving off, we strolled across the Piazza and down the street till we came to Morgano's. We sat in the garden. Around us people were talking in Russian, German, Italian and English. We ordered drinks. Donna Lucia, the host's wife, waddled up and in her low, sweet voice passed the time of day with us. Though middle-aged now and portly, she had still traces of the wonderful beauty that thirty years before had driven artists to paint so many bad portraits of her. Her eyes, large and liquid, were the eyes of Hera and her smile was affectionate and gracious. We three gossiped for a while, for there is always a scandal of one sort or another in Capri to make a topic of conversation, but nothing was said of particular interest and in a little while Wilson got up and left us. Soon afterwards we

strolled up to my friend's villa to dine. On the way he asked me what I had thought of Wilson.

'Nothing,' I said. 'I don't believe there's a word of truth in your story.'

'Why not?'

'He isn't the sort of man to do that sort of thing.'

'How does anyone know what anyone is capable of?'

'I should put him down as an absolutely normal man of business who's retired on a comfortable income from gilt-edged securities. I think your story's just the ordinary Capri tittle-tattle.'

'Have it your own way,' said my friend.

We were in the habit of bathing at a beach called the Baths of Tiberius. We took a fly down the road to a certain point then wandered through lemon groves and vineyards, noisy with cicadas and heavy with the hot smell of the sun, till we came to the top of the cliff down which a steep winding path led to the sea. A day or two later, just before we got down my friend said:

'Oh, there's Wilson back again'.

We scrunched over the beach, the only drawback to the bathing place being that it was shingle and not sand, and as we came along Wilson saw us and waved. He was standing up, a pipe in his mouth, and he wore nothing but a pair of trunks. His body was dark brown, thin but not emaciated, and considering his wrinkled face and grey hair, youthful. Hot from our walk, we undressed quickly and plunged at once into the water. Six feet from the shore it was thirty feet deep, but so clear that you could see the bottom. It was warm, yet invigorating.

When I got out Wilson was lying on his belly, with a towel under him reading a book. I lit a cigarette and went and sat down beside him.

'Had a nice swim?' he asked.

He put his pipe inside his book to mark the place and closing it put it down on the pebbles beside him. He was evidently willing to talk.

'Lovely,' I said. 'It's the best bathing in the world.'

'Of course people think those were the Baths of Tiberius.' He waved his hand towards a shapeless mass of masonry that stood half in the water and half out. 'But that's all rot. It was just one of his villas, you know.'

I did. But it is just as well to let people tell you things when they want to. It disposes them kindly towards you if you suffer them to impart information. Wilson gave a chuckle.

'Funny old fellow, Tiberius. Pity they're saying now there's not a word of truth in all those stories about him.'

He began to tell me all about Tiberius. Well, I had read my Suetonius too and I had read histories of the Early Roman Empire. So there was nothing very new to me in what he said. But I observed that he was not ill-read. I remarked on it.

'Oh, well, when I settled down here I was naturally interested, and I have plenty of time for reading. When you live in a place like this, with all its associations, it seems to make history so actual. You might almost be living in historical times yourself.'

I should remark here that this was in 1913. The world was an easy, comfortable place and no one could have imagined that anything might happen seriously to disturb the serenity of existence.

'How long have you been here?' I asked.

'Fifteen years.' He gave the blue and placid sea a glance, and a strangely tender smile hovered on his thin lips. 'I fell in love with the place at first sight. You've heard, I daresay, of the mythical German who came here on the Naples boat just for lunch and a look at the Blue Grotto and stayed forty years: Well, I can't say I exactly did that, but it's come to the same thing in the end. Only it won't be forty years in my case. Twenty-five; still, that's better than a poke in the eye with a sharp stick.'

I waited for him to go on. For what he had just said looked indeed as though there might be something after all in the singular story I had heard. But at that moment my friend came

dripping out of the water very proud of himself because he had swum a mile, and the conversation turned to other things.

After that I met Wilson several times, either in the Piazza or on the beach. He was amiable and polite. He was always pleased to have a talk and I found out that he not only knew every inch of the island but also the adjacent mainland. He had read a great deal on all sorts of subjects, but his speciality was the history of Rome and on this he was very well informed. He seemed to have little imagination and to be of no more than average intelligence. He laughed a good deal, but with restraint, and his sense of humour was tickled by simple jokes. A commonplace man. I did not forget the odd remark he had made during the first short chat we had had by ourselves, but he never so much as approached the topic again. One day on our return from the beach, dismissing the cab at the Piazza, my friend and I told the driver to be ready to take us up to Anacapri at five. We were going to climb Monte Solaro, dine at a tavern we favoured, and walk down in the moonlight. For it was full moon and the views by night were lovely. Wilson was standing by while we gave the cabman instructions, for we had given him a lift to save him the hot dusty walk, and more from politeness than for any other reason I asked him if he would care to join us.

'It's my party,' I said.

'I'll come with pleasure,' he answered.

But when the time came to set out my friend was not feeling well, he thought he had stayed too long in the water, and would not face the long and tiring walk. So I went alone with Wilson. We climbed the mountain, admired the spacious view, and got back to the inn as night was falling, hot, hungry and thirsty. We had ordered our dinner before-hand. The food was good, for Antonio was an excellent cook, and the wine came from his own vineyard. It was so light that you felt you could drink it like water and we finished the first bottle with our macaroni. By the time we had finished the second we felt that there was nothing much wrong with life. We sat in a little garden under a great vine laden with grapes. The air was

exquisitely soft. The night was still and we were alone. The maid brought us *bel paese* cheese and a plate of figs. I ordered coffee and strega, which is the best liquour they make in Italy. Wilson would not have a cigar, but lit his pipe.

'We've got plenty of time before we need start,' he said, 'the moon won't be over the hill for another hour'.

'Moon or no moon,' I said briskly, 'of course we've got plenty of time. That's one of the delights of Capri, that there's never any hurry.'

'Leisure', he said. 'If people only knew ! It's the most priceless thing a man can have and they're such fools they don't even know it's something to aim at. Work ? They work for work's sake. They haven't got the brains to realize that the only object of work is to obtain leisure.'

Wine has the effect on some people of making them indulge in general reflections. These remarks were true, but no one could have claimed that they were original. I did not say anything, but struck a match to light my cigar.

'It was full moon the first time I came to Capri,' he went on reflectively. 'It might be the same moon as tonight'.

'It was, you know,' I smiled.

He grinned. The only light in the garden was what came from an oil lamp that hung over our heads. It had been scanty to eat by, but it was good now for confidences.

'I didn't mean that. I mean, it might be yesterday. Fifteen years it is, and when I look back it seems like a month. I'd never been to Italy before. I came for my summer holiday. I went to Naples by boat from Marseilles and I had a look round, Pompeii, you know, and Paestum and one or two places like that; then I came here for a week. I liked the look of the place right away, from the sea, I mean, as I watched it come closer and closer; and then when we got into the little boats from the steamer and landed at the quay, with all that crowd of jabbering people who wanted to take your luggage, and the hotel touts, and the tumbledown houses on the Marina and the walk up to the hotel, and dining on the terrace—well, it just got me.

That's the truth. I didn't know if I was standing on my head or my heels. I'd never drunk Capri wine before, but I'd heard of it; I think I must have got a bit tight. I sat on that terrace after they'd all gone to bed and watched the moon over the sea, and there was Vesuvius with a great red plume of smoke rising up from it. Of course I know now that wine I drank was ink, Capri wine my eye, but I thought it all right then. But it wasn't the wine that made me drunk, it was the shape of the island and those jabbering people, the moon and the sea and the oleander in the hotel garden. I'd never seen an oleander before.'

It was a long speech and it had made him thirsty. He took up his glass, but it was empty. I asked him if he would have another *strega*.

'It's sickly stuff. Let's have a bottle of wine. That's sound, that is, pure juice of the grape and can't hurt anyone.'

I ordered more wine, and when it came filled the glasses. He took a long drink and after a sigh of pleasure went on.

'Next day I found my way to the bathing-place we go to. Not bad bathing, I thought. Then I wandered about the island. As luck would have it, there was a *festa* up at the Punta di Timberio and I ran straight into the middle of it. An image of the Virgin and priests, acolytes swinging censers, and a whole crowd of jolly, laughing, excited people, a lot of them all dressed up. I ran across an Englishman there and asked him what it was all about. 'Oh, it's the feast of the Assumption,' he said, 'at least that's what the Catholic Church says it is, but that's just their hanky-panky. It's the festival of Venus. Pagan, you know, Aphrodite rising from the sea and all that.' It gave me quite a funny feeling to hear him. It seemed to take one a long way back if you know what I mean. After that I went down one night to have a look at the Faraglioni by moonlight. If the fates had wanted me to go on being a bank manager they oughtn't to have let me take that walk.'

'You were a bank manager, were you?' I asked.

I had been wrong with him, but not far wrong.

'Yes. I was manager of the Crawford Street branch of the

York and City. It was convenient for me because I lived up Hendon way. I could get from door to door in thirty-seven minutes.'

He puffed at his pipe and relit it.

'That was my last night, that was. I'd got to be back at the bank on Monday morning. When I looked at those two great rocks sticking out of the water, with the moon above them, and all the little lights of the fishermen in their boats catching cuttle-fish, all so peaceful and beautiful, I said to myself, well, after all, why should I go back? It wasn't as if I had anyone dependent on me. My wife had died of bronchial pneumonia four years before and the kid went to live with her grandmother, my wife's mother. She was an old fool, she didn't look after the kid properly and she got blood-poisoning, they amputated her leg, but they couldn't save her and she died, poor little thing.

'How terrible', I said.

'Yes, I was cut up at the time, though of course not so much as if the kid had been living with me, but I dare say it was a mercy. Not much chance for a girl with only one leg. I was sorry about my wife too. We got on very well together. Though I don't know if it would have continued. She was the sort of woman who was always bothering about what other people'd think. She didn't like travelling. Eastbourne³ was her idea of a holiday. D'you know, I'd never crossed the channel till after death.'

'But I suppose you've got other relations, haven't you?'

'None, I was an only child. My father had a brother, but he went to Australia before I was born. I don't think anyone could easily be more alone in the world than I am. There wasn't any reason I could see why I shouldn't do exactly what I wanted. I was thirty-four at that time.'

He had told me he had been on the island for fifteen years. That would make him forty-nine. Just about the age I should have given him.

'I'd been working since I was seventeen. All I had to look forward to was doing the same old thing day after day till I

retired on my pension. I said to myself, is it worth it? What's wrong with chucking it all up and spending the rest of my life down here? It was the most beautiful place I'd ever seen. But I'd had a business training, I was cautious by nature. 'No', I said, 'I won't be carried away like this, I'll go tomorrow like I said I would and think it over. Perhaps when I get back to London I'll think quite differently.' Damned fool, wasn't I? I lost a whole year that way'.

'You didn't change your mind, then?'

'You bet I didn't. All the time I was working I kept thinking of the bathing here and the vineyards and the walks over the hills and the moon and the sea, and the Piazza in the evening when everyone walks about for a bit of a chat after the day's work is over. There was only one thing that bothered me : I wasn't sure if I was justified in not working like everybody else did. Then I read a sort of history book, by a man called Marion Crawford it was, and there was a story about Sybaris and Crotona⁵. There were two cities; and in Sybaris they just enjoyed life and had a good time, and in Crotona they were hardy and industrious and all that. And one day the men of Crotona came over and wiped Sybaris out, and then after a while a lot of other fellows came over from somewhere else and wiped Crotona out. Nothing remains of Sybaris, not a stone, and all that's left of Crotona is just one column. That settled the matter for me'.

'Oh?'

'It came to the same in the end, didn't it? And when you look back now, who were the mugs?'

I did not reply and he went on.

'The money was rather a bother. The bank didn't pension one off till after thirty years service, but if you retired before that they gave you a gratuity. With that and what I'd got for the sale of my house and the little I'd managed to save, I just hadn't enough to buy an annuity to last the rest of my life. It would have been silly to sacrifice everything so as to lead a pleasant life and not have a sufficient income to make it pleasant. I wanted to have a little place of my own, a servant

to look after me, enough to buy tobacco, decent food, books now and then, and something over for emergencies. I knew, pretty well how much I needed. I found I had just enough to buy an annuity for twenty-five years.'

'You were thirty five at the time?'

'Yes, It would carry me on till I was sixty. After all, no one can be certain of living longer than that, a lot of men die in their fifties, and by the time a man's sixty he's had the best of life.'

'On the other hand no one can be sure of dying at sixty,' I said.

'Well, I don't know. It depends on himself, doesn't it?'

'In your place I should have stayed on at the bank till I was entitled to my pension.'

'I should have been forty-seven then. I shouldn't have been too old to enjoy my life here, I'm older than that now and I enjoy it as much as I ever did, but I should have been too old to experience the particular pleasure of a young man. You know, you can have just as good a time at fifty as you can at thirty, but it's not the same sort of good time. I wanted to live the perfect life while I still had the energy and the spirit to make the most of it. Twenty-five years seemed a long time to me; and twenty-five years of happiness seemed worth paying something pretty substantial for. I'd made up my mind to wait a year and I waited a year. Then I sent in my resignation and as soon as they paid me my gratuity I bought the annuity and came on here.'

'An annuity for twenty-five years?'

'That's right.'

'Have you never regretted?'

'Never, I've had my money's worth already. And I've got ten years more.' Don't you think after twenty-five years of perfect happiness one ought to be satisfied to call it a day?'

'Perhaps.'

He did not say in so many words what he would do then, but his intention was clear. It was pretty much the story my

friend had told me, but it sounded different when I heard it from his own lips. I stole a glance at him. There was nothing about him that was not ordinary. No one, looking at that neat, prim face, could have thought him capable of an unconventional action. I did not blame him. It was his own life that he had arranged in this strange manner, and I did not see why he should not do what he liked with it. Still, I could not prevent the little shiver that ran down my spine.

‘Getting chilly?’ he smiled. ‘We might as well start walking down. The moon’ll be up by now.’

Before we parted Wilson asked me if I would like to go and see his house one day; and two or three days later, finding out where he lived, I strolled up to see him. It was a peasant’s cottage, well away from the town in a vineyard, with a view of the sea. By the side of the door grew a great oleander in full flower. There were only two small rooms, a tiny kitchen and a lean-to in which fire-wood could be kept. The bedroom was furnished like a monk’s cell, but the sitting-room, smelling agreeably of tobacco, was comfortable enough, with two large arm-chairs that he had brought from England, a large roll-top desk, a cottage piano and crowded bookshelves. On the walls were framed engravings of pictures by G. F. Watts and Lord Leighton.⁷ Wilson told me that the house belonged to the owner of the vineyard who lived in another cottage higher up the hill, and his wife came in every day to do the rooms and the cooking. He had found the place on his first visit to Capri, and taking it on his return for good had been there ever since. Seeing the piano and music open on it, I asked him if he would play.

‘I’m no good, you know, but I’ve always been fond of music and I get a lot of fun out of strumming’.

He sat down at the piano and played one of the movements from a Beethoven sonata. He did not play very well. I looked at his music Schumann and Schubert, Beethoven, Bach and Chopin. On the table on which he had his meals was a greasy pack of cards. I asked him if he played patience.

‘A lot.’

From what I saw of him then and from what I heard from

other people I made for myself what I think must have been a fairly accurate picture of the life he had led for the last fifteen years. It was certainly a very harmless one. He bathed; he walked a great deal, and he seemed never to lose his sense of the beauty of the island which he knew so intimately, he played the piano and he played patience, he read. When he was asked to a party he went and, though a trifle dull, was agreeable. He was not affronted if he was neglected. He liked people, but with an aloofness that prevented intimacy. He lived thriftily, but with sufficient comfort. He never owed a penny. I imagine he had never been a man whom sex had greatly troubled, and if in his younger days he had had now and then a passing affair with a visitor to the island whose head was turned by the atmosphere, his emotion, while it lasted, remained, I am pretty sure, well under his control. I think he was determined that nothing should interfere with his independence of spirit. His only passion was for the beauty of nature, and he sought felicity in the simple and natural things that life offers to everyone. You may say that it was a grossly selfish existence. It was. He was of no use to anybody, but on the other hand he did nobody any harm. His only object was his own happiness, and it looked as though he had attained it. Very few people know where to look for happiness; fewer still find it. I don't know whether he was a fool or a wise man. He was certainly a man who knew his own mind. The odd thing about him to me was that he was so immensely commonplace. I should never have given him a second thought but for what I knew, that on a certain day, ten years from then, unless a chance illness cut the thread before, he must deliberately take leave of the world he loved so well. I wondered whether it was thought of this, never quite absent from his mind, that gave him the peculiar zest with which he enjoyed every moment of the day.

I should do him an injustice if I omitted to state that he was not at all in the habit of talking about himself. I think the friend I was staying with was the only person in whom he has confided. I believe he only told me the story because he suspected I already knew it, and on the evening on which he told it me he had drunk a good deal of wine.

My visit drew to a close and I left the island. The year after, war broke out. A number of things happened to me, so that the course of my life was greatly altered, and it was thirteen years before I went to Capri again. My friend had been back some time but he was no longer so well off, and had moved into a house that had no room for me; so I was putting up at the hotel. He came to meet me at the boat and we dined together. During dinner I asked him where exactly his house was.

‘You know it’, he answered. ‘It’s the little place Wilson had. I’ve built on a room and made it quite nice.’

With so many other things to occupy my mind I had not given Wilson a thought for years; but now, with a little shock, I remembered. The ten years he had before him when I made his acquaintance must have elapsed long ago.

‘Did he commit suicide as he said he would?’

‘It’s rather a grim story.’

Wilson’s plan was all right. There was only one flaw in it and this, I suppose, he could not have foreseen. It had never occurred to him that after twenty-five years of complete happiness, in this quite backwater, with nothing in the world to disturb his serenity, his character would gradually lose its strength. The will needs obstacles in order to exercise its power; when it is never thwarted, when no effort is needed to achieve one’s desires, because one has placed one’s desires only in the things that can be obtained by stretching out one’s hand, the will grows impotent. If you walk on a level all the time the muscles you need to climb a mountain will atrophy. These observations are trite, but there they are. When Wilson’s annuity expired he had no longer the resolution to make the end which was the price he had agreed to pay for that long period of happy tranquillity. I do not think, as far as I could gather, both from what my friend told me and afterwards from others, that he wanted courage. It was just that he couldn’t make up his mind. He put it off from day to day.

He had lived on the island for so long and had always settled his accounts so punctually that it was easy for him to get credit; never having borrowed money before, he found a

number of people who were willing to lend him small sums when now he asked for them. He had paid his rent regularly for so many years that his landlord, whose wife Assunta still acted as his servant, was content to let things slide for several months. Everyone believed him when he said that a relative had died and that he was temporarily embarrassed because owing to legal formalities he could not for some time get the money that was due to him. He managed to hang on after this fashion for something over a year. Then he could get no more credit from the local tradesmen, and there was no one to lend him any more money. His landlord gave him notice to leave the house unless he paid up the arrears of rent before a certain date.

The day before this he went into his tiny bedroom, closed the door and the window, drew the curtain and lit a brazier of charcoal. Next morning when Assunta came to make his breakfast she found him insensible but still alive. The room was draughty, and though he had done this and that to keep out of fresh air he had not done it very thoroughly. It almost looked as though at the last moment, and desperate though his situation was, he had suffered from a certain infirmity of purpose. Wilson was taken to the hospital, and though very ill for some time he at last recovered. But as a result either of the charcoal poisoning or of the shock he was no longer in complete possession of his faculties. He was not insane, at all events not insane enough to be put in an asylum, but he was quite obviously no longer in his right mind.

'I went to see him,' said my friend. 'I tried to get him to talk, but he kept looking at me in funny sort of way, as though he couldn't quite make out where he'd seen me before. He looked rather awful lying there in bed, with a week's growth of grey beard on his chin; but except for that funny look in his eye he seemed quite normal.'

'What funny look in his eyes?'

'I don't know exactly how to describe it. Puzzled. It's an absurd comparison, but suppose you threw a stone up into the air and it didn't come down but just stayed there...'

'It would be rather bewildering,' I said.

‘Well, that’s the sort of look he had.’

It was difficult to know what to do with. He had no money and no means of getting any. His effects were sold, but for too little to pay what he owed. He was English, and the Italian authorities did not wish to make themselves responsible for him. The British Consul in Naples had no funds to deal with the case. He could of course be sent back to England, but no one seemed to know what could be done with him when he got there. Then Assunta, the servant, said that he had been a good master and a good tenant, and as long as he had the money had paid his way; he could sleep in the woodshed in the cottage in which she and her husband lived, and he could share their meals. This was suggested to him. It was difficult to know whether he understood or not. When Assunta came to take him from the hospital he went with her without remark. He seemed to have no longer a will of his own. She had been keeping him now for two years.

‘It’s not very comfortable, you know,’ said my friend. ‘They’ve rigged him up a ramshackle bed and given him a couple of blankets, but there’s no window, and it’s icy cold in winter and like an oven in summer. And the food’s pretty rough. You know how these peasants eat : macaroni on Sundays and meat once in a blue moon.⁸’

‘What does he do with himself all the time?’

‘He wanders about the hills. I’ve tried to see him two or three times, but it’s no good; when he sees you coming he runs like a hare. Assunta comes down to have a chat with me now and then I give her a bit of money so that she can buy him tobacco, but God knows if he ever gets it.’

‘Do they treat him all right?’ I said.

‘I’m sure Assunta’s kind enough. She treats him like a child. I’m afraid her husband’s not very nice to him. He grudges the cost of his keep. I don’t believe he’s cruel or anything like that, but I think he’s a bit sharp with him. He makes him fetch water and clean the cowshed and that sort of thing.’

‘It sounds pretty rotten,’ I said.

He brought it on himself. After all he's only got what he deserved.

'I think on the whole we all get what we deserve,' I said. 'But that does not prevent its being rather horrible.'

Two or three days later my friend and I were taking a walk. We were strolling along a narrow path through an olive grove.

'There's Wilson', said my friend suddenly. 'Don't look, you'll only frighten him. Go straight on.'

I walked with my eyes on the path, but out of the corners of them I saw a man hiding behind an olive tree. He did not move as we approached, but I felt that he was watching us. As soon as we had passed I heard a scamper. Wilson, like a hunted animal, had made for safety. That was the last I ever saw of him.

He died last year. He had endured that life for six years. He was found one morning on the mountainside lying quite peacefully as though he had died in his sleep. From where he lay he had been able to see those two great rocks called Faraglioni which stand out of the sea. It was full moon and he must have gone to see them by moonlight. Perhaps he died of the beauty of that sight.

THE OX

H. E. BATES

I

The Thurlows lived on a small hill. As though it were not high enough, the house was raised up, as on invisible stilts; with a wooden flight of steps to the front door. Exposed and isolated, the wind striking as it from all quarters, it seemed to have no part with the surrounding landscape. Empty ploughed lands, in winter-time, stretched away on all sides in wet steel curves.

At half-past seven every morning Mrs. Thurlow pushed her great rusty bicycle down the hill; at six every evening she pushed it back. Loaded, always, with grey bundles of washing, oilcans, sacks, cabbages, bundles of old newspaper, boughs of wind-blown wood and bags of chicken food, the bicycle could never be ridden. It was a vehicle of necessity. Her relationship to it was that of a beast to a cart. Slogging along beside it, flat heavy feet pounding painfully along under mudstained skirts, her face and body ugly with lumpy angles of bone, she was like a beast of burden.

Coming out of the house, raised up even above the level of the small hill, she stepped into a country of wide horizons. This fact meant nothing to her. The world into which she moved was very small : from six to nine she cleaned for the two retired sisters, nine to twelve for the retired photographer, twelve-thirty to three for the poultry farm, four to six for the middle aged bachelor. She did not think of going beyond the four lines which made up the square of her life. She thought of other people going beyond them, but this was different. Staring down at a succession of wet floors, working always for other people, against time, she had somehow got into the habit of not thinking about herself.

She thought much, in the same stolid pounding way as she pushed the bicycle, of other people : in particular of Thurlow, more particularly of her two sons. She had married late; the boys were nine and thirteen. She saw them realizing refined ambitions, making their way as assistants in shops, as clerks in offices, even as butlers. Heavily built, with faces having her own angular boniness, they moved with eyes on the ground. She had saved money for them. For fifteen years she had hoarded the scrubbing-and-washing money, keeping it in a bran bag under a mattress in the back bedroom. They did not know of it; she felt that no one, not even Thurlow, knew of it.

Thurlow had a silver plate in his head. In his own eyes it set him apart from other men. 'I got a plate in me head. Solid silver. Enough silver to make a dozen spoons and a bit over. Solid. Beat that !'¹ Wounded on the Marne,² and now walking about with the silver plate in his head, Thurlow was a martyr. 'I didn't ought to stoop. I didn't ought to do nothing. By rights. By rights I didn't ought to lift a finger.' He was a hedge cutter. 'Lucky I'm tall, else that job wouldn't be no good to me.' He had bad days and good days, even days of genuine pain. 'Me plate's hurting me! It's me plate. By God, it'll drive me so's I don't know what I'm doing! It's me plate again.' And he would stand wild and vacant, rubbing his hands through his thin black hair, clawing his scalp as though to wrench out the plate and the pain.

Once a week, on Saturdays or Sundays, he came home a little tipsy, in a good mood, laughing to himself, riding his bicycle up the hill like some comic rider in a circus. 'Eh? Too much be damned. I can ride me bike, can't I ? S' long as I can ride me bike I'm all right.' In the pubs he had only one theme. 'I got a plate in me head. Solid silver,' recited in a voice challenging the world to prove it otherwise.

All the time Mrs. Thurlow saved money. It was her creed. Sometimes people went away and there was no cleaning. She then made up the gap in her life by other work : picking

potatoes, planting potatoes, dibbing cabbages, spudding roots, pea picking, more washing. In the fields she pinned up her skirt so that it stuck out behind her like a thick stiff tail, making her look like some bony ox. She did washing from five to six in the morning, and again from seven to nine in the evening. Taking in more washing, she tried to wash more quickly, against time. Somehow she succeeded, so that from nine to ten she had time for ironing. She worked by candlelight. Her movements were largely instinctive. She had washed and ironed for so long, in the same way, at the same time and place, that she could have worked in darkness.

There were some things, even, which could be done in darkness; and so at ten, with Thurlow and the sons in bed, she blew out candle, broke up the fire, and sat folding the clothes or cleaning boots and thinking. Her thoughts like her work, went always along the same lines, towards the future, out into the resplendent avenues of ambitions, always for the two sons. There was a division in herself, the one part stolid and uncomplaining in perpetual labour, the other fretful and almost desperate in an anxiety to establish a world beyond her own. She had saved fifty-four pounds. She would make it a hundred. How it was to be done she could not think. The boys were growing; the cost of keeping them was growing. She trusted in some obscure providential power as tireless and indomitable as herself.

At eleven she went to bed, going up the wooden stairs in darkness, in her stockinged feet. She undressed in darkness, her clothes falling away to be replaced by a heavy grey night-gown that her body seem still larger and more ponderous. She fell asleep almost at once, but throughout the night her mind, propelled by some inherent anxiety, seemed to work on. She dreamed she was pushing the bicycle down the hill, and then she was pushing it up again; she dreamed she was scrubbing floors; she felt the hot stab of the iron on her spittled finger and then the frozen bite of icy swedes as she picked them off

unthawed earth on bitter mornings. She counted her money, her mind going back over the years throughout which she had saved it, and then counted it again, in fear, to make sure, as though in terror that it might be gone in the morning.

II

She had one relaxation. On Sunday afternoons she sat in the kitchen alone, and read the newspapers. They were not the newspapers of the day, but of all previous week and perhaps of the week before that. She had collected them from the houses where she scrubbed, bearing them home on the bicycle. Through them and by them she broke the boundaries of her world. She made excursions into the lives of other people : tragic lovers, cabinet ministers, Atlantic flyers, suicides, society, beauties, murderers, kings. It was all very wonderful. But emotionally as she read, her face showed no impression. It remained ox-like in its impassivity. It looked in some way indomitably strong, as though little things like beauties and suicides, murderers and kings, could have no possible effect on her. About three o'clock, as she sat reading, Thurlow would come in, lumber upstairs, and sleep until about half-past four.

One Sunday he did not come in at three o'clock. It was after four when she heard the bicycle tinkle against the woodshed outside. She raised her head from the newspaper and listened for him to come in. Nothing happened. Then after about five minutes Thurlow came in, went upstairs, remained for some minutes, and then came down again. She heard him go out into the yard. There was a stir among the chickens as he lumbered about the woodshed.

Mrs. Thurlow got up and went outside, and there, at the door of the woodshed, Thurlow was just hiding something under his coat. She thought it seemed like his billhook. She was not sure. Something made her say :

'Your saw don't need sharpening again already, does it?'

'That it does,' he said. 'That's just what it does. Joe Woods

is going to sharpen it.' Thurlow looked upset and slightly wild, as he did when the plate in his head was hurting him. His eyes were a little drink-fired, dangerous. 'I gonna take it down now, so's I can git it back tonight.'

All the time she could see the saw itself hanging in the darkness of the woodshed behind him. She was certain then that he was lying, almost certain that it was the billhook he had under his coat.

She did not say anything else. Thurlow got on his bicycle and rode off, down the hill, his coat bunched up, the bicycle slightly crazy as he drove with one tipsy hand.

Something, as soon as he had gone, made her rush upstairs. She went into the back bedroom and flung the clothes off the mattress of the small iron bed that was never slept in. The money : it was all right. It was quite all right. She sat down heavily on the bed. And after a moment's anxiety her colour returned again—the solid, immeasurably passive calm with which she scrubbed, read the newspapers, and pushed the bicycle.

In the evening, the boys at church, she worked again. She darned socks, the cuffs of jackets, cleaned boots, sorted the washing for the following day. The boys must look well, respectable. Under the new scheme they went, now, to a secondary school in the town. She was proud of this, the first real stepping-stone to the higher things of the future. Outside, the night was windy, and she heard the now brief, now very prolonged moan of wind over the dark winter-ploughed land. She worked by candlelight. When the boys came in she lighted the lamp. In their hearts, having now some standard by which to judge her, they despised her a little. They hated the cheapness of the candlelight. When they had eaten and gone lumbering up to bed, like two colts, she blew out the lamp and worked by candlelight again. Thurlow had not come in.

He came in a little before ten. She was startled, not hearing the bicycle.

'You want something t' eat ?'

'No,' he said. He went straight into the scullery. She heard him washing his hands, swilling the sink, washing, swilling again.

'You want the light?' she called.

'No!'

He came into the kitchen. She saw his still-wet hands in the candlelight. He gave her one look and went upstairs without speaking. For some time she pondered on the memory of this look, not understanding it. She saw in it the wildness of the afternoon, as though the plate were hurting him, but now it had in addition fear, and above fear, defiance.

She got the candle and went to the door. The wind tore the candle flame down to a minute blue bubble which broke, and she went across the yard, to the woodshed, in darkness. In the wood-shed she put a match to the candle again, held the candle up at the eye level, and looked at the walls. The saw hung on its nail but there was no billhook. She made a circle with the candle, looking for the bicycle with dumb eyes. It was not there. She went into the house again. Candleless, faintly perturbed, she went up to bed. She wanted to say something to Thurlow, but he was dead still, as though asleep; and she lay down herself, hearing nothing but the sound of Thurlow's breathing and, outside, the sound of the wind blowing across the bare land.

Asleep, she dreamed, as nearly always, about the bicycle, but this time it was Thurlow's bicycle and there was something strange about it. It had no handles, but only Thurlow's billhook where the handles should have been. She grasped the billhook, and in her dream she felt the pain of the blood rushing out of her hands, and she was terrified and woke up.

Immediately she put out her hands, to touch Thurlow. The bed was empty. That scared her. She got out of bed. 'Thurlow!'

The wind had dropped, and it was quiet everywhere. She

went downstairs. There, in the kitchen, she lighted the candle again and looked round. She tried the back door; it was unlocked and she opened it and looked out, feeling the small ground wind icy on her bare feet.

‘ThurLOW!’ she said. ‘Bill ! ThurLOW !’

She could hear nothing, and after about a minute she went back up stairs. She looked in at the boys’ bedroom. The boys were asleep, and the vast candle shadow of herself stood behind her and listened, as it were, while she listened. She went into her own bedroom. ThurLOW was not there. Then she went into the back bedroom.

The mattress lay on the floor. And she knew, even before she began to look for it, that the money was gone. She knew that ThurLOW had taken it.

Since there was nothing else she could do, she went back to bed, not to sleep, but to lie there, oppressed but never in despondency, thinking. The money had gone, ThurLOW had gone, but it would be all right.

Just before five she got up, fired the copper, and began the washing. At seven she hung it out in long grey lines in the wintry grey light, holding the pegs like a bit in her teeth. A little after seven the boys came down to wash in the scullery.

‘Here, here! Mum! There’s blood all over the sink!’

‘Your dad killed a rabbit’, she said. ‘That’s all;’

She lumbered out into the garden, to cut cabbages. She cut three large cabbages, put them in a sack, and, as though nothing had happened, began to prepare the bicycle for the day. She tied the cabbages on the carrier, two oilcans on the handlebars, and then on the crossbar, a small bundle of washing, clean, which she had finished on Saturday. That was all : nothing much for a Monday.

At half-past seven the boys went across the fields, by footpath, to catch the bus for school. She locked the house, and then, huge imperturbable, planting down great feet in the

mud, she pushed the bicycle down the hill. She had not gone a hundred yards before, out of the hedge, two policemen stepped into the road to meet her.

'We was wondering if Mr. Thurlow was in?'

'No,' she said, 'he ain't in.'⁶

'You ain't seen him.'

'No, I ain't seen him.'

'Since when?'

'Since last night'.

'You mind,' they said, 'if we look round your place?'

'No,' she said, 'you got on up. I got to git down to Miss Hanley's.' She began to push the bicycle forward, to go.

'No', they said. 'You must come back with us.'

So she turned the bicycle round and pushed it back up the hill again. 'You could leave your bike,' one of the policemen said. 'No' she said, 'I'd better bring it. You can never tell nowadays what folk are going to be up to.'

Up at the house she stood impassively by while the two policemen searched the woodshed, the garden, and finally the house itself. Her expression did not change as they looked at the blood in the sink. 'He washed his hands there last night,' she said.

'Don't touch it,' the policeman said. 'Don't touch it.' And then suspiciously, almost in implied accusation: 'You ain't touched nothing—not since last night?'

'I got something else to do,' she said.

'We'd like you to come along with us, Mrs. Thurlow,' they said, 'and answer a few questions.'

'All right.' She went outside and took hold of her bicycle.

'You can leave your bicycle.'

'No,' she said. 'I'll take it. It's no naughty⁷ way, up here, from that village.'

‘We got a car down the road. You don’t want a bike.’

‘I better take it,’ she said.

She wheeled the bicycle down the hill. When one policeman had gone in the car she walked on with the other. Ponderous, flat-footed, unhurried, she looked as though she could have gone on pushing the bicycle in the same direction, at the same pace, for ever.

They kept her four hours at the station. She told them about the billhook, the blood, the way Thurlow had come home and gone again, her waking in the night, Thurlow not being there, the money not being there.

‘The money. How much was there ?’

‘Fifty-four pounds, sixteen and four pence. And twenty-eight of that in sovereigns.’

In return they told her something else.

‘You know that Thurlow was in the Black Horse from eleven to two yesterday ?’

‘Yes, I dare say that’s where he’d be. That’s where he always is, Sundays.’

‘He was in the Black Horse, and for about two hours he was arguing with a man stopping down here from London. Arguing about that plate in his head. The man said he knew the plate was aluminium and Thurlow said he knew it was silver. Thurlow got very threatening. Did you know that ?’

‘No. But that’s just like him.’

‘This man hasn’t been seen since, and Thurlow hasn’t been seen since. Except by you last night.’

‘Do you want me any more ?’ she said. ‘I ought to have been at Miss Hanley’s hours ago.’

‘You realize this is very important, very serious ?’

‘I know. But how am I going to get Miss Hanley in, and Mrs. Acott, and then the poultry farm and then Mr. George ?’

'We'll telephone Miss Hanley and tell her you can't go.'

'The money,' she said. 'That's what I can't understand. The money.'

III

It was the money which brought her, without showing it, to the edge of distress. She thought of it all day. She thought of it as hard cash, coin, gold and silver, hard-earned and hard-saved. But it was also something much more. It symbolized the future, another life, two lives. It was the future itself. If, as seemed possible, something terrible had happened and a life had been destroyed, it did not seem to her more terrible than the fact that the money had gone and that the future had been destroyed.

As she scrubbed the floors at the poultry farm in the late afternoon, the police telephoned for her again. 'We can send the car for her,' they said.

'I got my bike,' she said 'I'll walk.'

With the oilcans filled, and cabbages and clean washing now replaced by newspapers and dirty washing she went back to the police station. She wheeled her bicycle into the lobby and they then told her how, that afternoon, the body of the man from London had been found, in a spinney, killed by blows from some sharp instrument like an axe. 'We have issued a warrant for Thurlow's arrest,' they said.

'You never found the money?' she said.

'No', they said. 'No doubt that'll come all right when we find Thurlow.'

That evening, when she got home she fully expected Thurlow to be there, as usual, splitting kindling wood with the billhook, in the outhouse, by candlelight. The same refusal to believe that life could change made her go upstairs to look for the money. The absence of both Thurlow and the money moved her to no sign of emotion. But she was moved to a decision.

She got out her bicycle and walked four miles, into the

next village, to see her brother. Though she did not ride the bicycle, it seemed to her as essential as ever that she should take it with her. Grasping its handles, she felt a sense of security and fortitude. The notion of walking without it, helplessly, in the darkness, was unthinkable.

Her brother was a master carpenter, a chapel-going⁸ man of straight-grained thinking and purpose, who had no patience with solvency. He lived with his wife and his mother in a white-painted electrically lighted house whose floors were covered with scrubbed coco-matting. His mother was a small woman with shrill eyes and ironed-out mouth who could not hear well.

Mrs. Thurlow knocked on the door of the house as though these people, her mother and brother, were strangers to her. Her brother came to the door and she said :

‘It’s Lil⁹. I come to see if you’d seen anything o’ Thurlow?

‘No’, we ain’t seen him. Summat up?¹⁰

‘Who is it?’ the old woman called.

‘It’s Lil,’ the brother said, in a louder voice. ‘She says have we seen anything o’ Thurlow?’

‘No, an’ don’t want!’

Mrs. Thurlow went in. For fifteen years her family had openly disapproved of Thurlow. She sat down on the edge of the chair nearest the door. Her large lace-up boots made large black mud prints on the virgin coco-matting. She saw her sister-in-law look first at her boots and then at her hat. She had worn the same boots and the same hat for longer than she herself could remember. But her sister-in-law remembered.

She sat untroubled, her eyes sullen, as though not fully conscious in the bright electric light. The light showed up the mud on her skirt, her straggling grey hair under the shapeless hat, the edges of her black coat weather-faded to a purplish grey.

‘So you ain’t heard nothing about Thurlow?’ she said.

'No', her brother said. 'Be funny if we had, wouldn't it? He ain't see foot in this house since dad died.' He looked at her hard. 'Why? What's up?'

She raised her eyes to him. Then she lowered them again. It was almost a minute before she spoke.

'Ain't you heard?' she said. 'They reckon he's done a murder.'

'What's she say?' the old lady said. 'I never heard her.'

Mrs. Thurlow looked dully at her boots, at the surrounding expanse of coco-matting. For some reason the fissured pattern of the coco-matting, so clean and regular, fascinated her. She said: 'He took all the money. He took it all and they can't find him.'

'Eh? What's she say? What's she mumbling about?'

The brother, his face white, went over to the old woman. He said into her ear: 'One of the boys is¹¹ won a scholarship. She come over to tell us.'

'When summat to do, I should think, don't she? Traipsing over here to tell us that'.

The man sat down at the table. He was very white, his hands shaking. His wife sat with the same dumb, shaking expression of shock. Mrs. Thurlow raised her eyes from the floor. It was as though she had placed on them the onus of some terrible responsibility.

'For god's sake,' the man said, 'when did it happen?'

All Mrs. Thurlow could think of was the money. 'Over fifty pounds. I got it hid under the mattress. I don't know how he could have found out about it. I don't know. I can't think. It's all I got. I got it for the boys.' She paused, pursing her lips together, squeezing back emotion. 'It's about the boys I come.'

'The boys?' The brother looked up, scared afresh. 'He ain't —they—'

'I didn't know whether you'd have them here,' she said.

'Till it's blowed over.¹² Till they find Thurlow. Till things are straightened out.'

'Then they ain't found him?'

'No, He's done a bunk. They say as soon as they find him I shall git the money.'

'Yes,' the brother said. 'We'll have them here.'

She stayed a little longer, telling the story dully, flatly, to the scared pairs of eyes across the table and to the old shrill eyes, enraged because they could not understand, regarding her from the fireplace. An hour after she arrived, she got up to go. Her brother said : 'Let me run you back in the car. I got a car now. Had it three or four months. I'll run you back.'

'No, I got my bike, she said.'

She pushed the bicycle home in the darkness. At home, in the kitchen, the two boys were making a rabbit hutch. She saw that they had something of her brother's zeal for handling wood. She saw that their going to him would be a good thing. He was a man who had got on in the world : she judged him by the car, the white-painted house, the electric light, the spotless coco-matting. She saw the boys, with deep but inexpressible pride, going to the same height, beyond it.

'Dad ain't been home,' they said.

She told them there had been a little trouble. 'They think your dad took some money.' She explained how it would be better for them, and for her, if they went to stay with her brother. 'Git to bed now and I'll get your things packed.'

'You mean we gotta go and live there?'

'For a bit,' she said.

They were excited. 'We could plane the wood for the rabbit hutch!' they said. 'Make a proper job of it'.

IV

That night, and again on the following morning, she looked

under the mattress for the money. In the morning the boys departed. She was slightly depressed, slightly relieved by their excitement. When they had gone she bundled the day's washing together and tied it on the bicycle. She noticed, then, that the back tyre had a slow puncture, that it was already almost flat. This worried her. She pumped up the tyre and felt a little more confident.

Then, as she prepared to push the bicycle down the hill, she saw the police car coming along the road at the bottom. Two policemen hurried up the track to meet her.

'We got Thurlow,' they said. 'We'd like you to come to the station.'

'Is he got the money?' she said.

'There hasn't been time,' they said, 'to go into that.'

As on the previous morning she pushed her bicycle to the village, walking with one policeman while the other drove on in the car. Of Thurlow she said very little. Now and then she stopped and stopped to pinch the back tyre of the bicycle. 'Like I thought. I got a slow puncture,' she would say. 'Yes, it's gone down since I blowed it up. I s'll have to leave it at the bike shop as we go by.'

Once she asked the policeman if he thought that Thurlow had the money. He said, 'I'm afraid he's done something more serious than taking money.'

She pondered over this statement with dull astonishment. More serious? She knew that nothing could be more serious. To her the money was like a huge and irreplaceable section of her life. It was part of herself, bone and flesh, blood and sweat. Nothing could replace it. Nothing, she knew with absolute finality, could mean so much.

In the village she left the bicycle at the cycle shop. Walking on without it, she lumbered dully from side to side, huge and unsteady, as though lost. From the cycle-shop window the repairer squinted after her, excited. Other people looked from

other windows as she lumbered past, always a pace or two behind the policeman, her ill-shaped feet painfully set down. At the entrance to the police station there was a small crowd. She went heavily into the station. Policemen were standing about in a room. An inspector, many papers in his hand, spoke to her. She listened heavily. She looked about for a sign of Thurlow. The inspector said, with kindness, 'Your husband is not here.' She felt a sense of having been cheated. 'They are detaining him at Metford. We are going over there now.'

'You know anything about the money?' she said.

Five minutes later she drove away, with the inspector and two other policemen, in a large black car. Travelling fast, she felt herself hurled, as it were, beyond herself. Mind and body seemed separated, her thoughts numbed. As the car entered the town, slowing down, she looked out of the side windows, saw posters : 'Metford Murder Arrest.' People, seeing policemen in the car, gaped. 'Murder Sensation Man Detained.'

Her mind registered impressions gravely and confusedly. People and posters were swept away from her and she was conscious of their being replaced by other people, the police station, corridors in the station, walls of brown glazed brick, fresh faces, a room, desks covered with many papers, eyes looking at her, box files in white rows appearing also to look at her, voices talking to her, an arm touching her, a voice asking her to sit down.

'I have to tell you, Mrs. Thurlow, that we have detained your husband on a charge of murder.'

'He say anything about the money?'

'He has made a statement. In a few minutes he will be charged and then remanded for further inquiries. You are at liberty to see him for a few moments if you would like to do so.'

In a few moments she was standing in a cell, looking at

Thurlow. He looked at her as though he did not know what had happened. His eyes were lumps of impressionless glass. He stood with long arms loose at his sides. For some reason he looked strange, foreign, not himself. It was more than a minute before she realised why this was. Then she saw that he was wearing a new suit. It was a grey suit, thick, readymade, and the sleeves were too short for him. They hung several inches above his thick protuberant wrist bones, giving his hands a look of inert defeat.

‘You got the money, ain’t you?’ she said. ‘You got it?’

He looked at her. ‘Money?’

‘The money you took. The money under the mattress.’

He stared at her. Money? He looked at her with a faint expression of appeal. Money. He continued to stare at her with complete blankness, Money?

‘You remember,’ she said, ‘The money under the mattress.’

‘Eh?’

‘The money. That money. Don’t you remember?’

He shook his head.

After some moments she went out of the cell. She carried out with her the sense of Thurlow’s defeat as she saw it expressed in the inert hands, the dead, stupefied face, and his vacant inability to remember anything. She heard the court proceedings without interest or emotion. She was oppressed by a sense of increasing bewilderment, a feeling that she was lost. She was stormed by impressions she did not understand. ‘I do not propose to put in a statement at this juncture. I ask for a remand until the sixteenth.’ ‘Remand granted. Clear the court.’

This effect of being stormed by impressions continued outside the court, as she drove away again in the car. People. Many faces. Cameras. More faces. Posters. The old sensation of mind severed from body, of thoughts numbed. In the village, when the car stopped, there were more impressions: more

voicès, more people a feeling of suppressed excitement. 'We will run you home,' the policemen said.

'No,' she said, 'I got my cleaning to do. I got to pick up my bicycle.

She fetched the bicycle and wheeled it slowly through the village. People looked at her, seemed surprised to see her in broad daylight, made gestures as though they wished to speak, and then went on. Grasping the handles of the bicycle, she felt a return of security, almost of comfort. The familiar smooth handlebars hard against her hands had the living response of other hands. They brought back her sense of reality : Miss Hanley, the cleaning, the poultry farm, the time she had lost, the boys, the money, the fact that something terrible had happened, the monumental fact of Thurlow's face, inert and dead, with its lost sense of remembrance.

Oppressed by a sense of duty, she did her cleaning as though nothing had happened. People were very kind to her. Miss Hanley made tea, the retired photographer would have run her home in his car. She was met everywhere by tender, remote words of comfort.

She pushed home her bicycle in the darkness. At Miss Hanley's, at the poultry farm, at the various places where she worked, the thought of the money had been partially set aside. Now, alone again, she felt the force of its importance more strongly, with the beginnings of bitterness. In the empty house she worked for several hours by candle light, washing, folding, ironing. About the house the vague noises of wine periodically resolved themselves into what she believed for a moment were the voices of the two boys. She thought of the boys with calm unhappiness, and the thought of them brought back with renewed force the thought of the money. This thought hung over her with the huge preponderance of her own shadow projected on the ceiling above her.

On the following Sunday afternoon she sat in the empty

kitchen, as usual, and read the stale newspapers. But now they recorded, not the unreal lives of other people, but the life of Thurlow and herself. She saw Thurlow's photograph. She read the same story told in different words in different papers. In all the stories there was an absence of all mention of the only thing that mattered. There was no single word about the money.

During the next few weeks much happened, but she did not lose the belief that the money was coming back to her. Nothing could touch the hard central core of her optimism. She saw the slow evolution of circumstances about Thurlow as things of subsidiary importance, the loss of the life he had taken and the loss of his own life as things which, terrible in themselves, seemed less terrible than the loss of ideals built up by her sweat and blood.

She knew, gradually, that Thurlow was doomed, that it was all over. She did not know what to do. Her terror seemed remote, muffled, in some way incoherent. She pushed the bicycle back and forth each day in the same ponderous manner as ever, her heavy feet slopping dully beside it.

When she saw Thurlow for the last time his face had not changed, one way or the other, from its fixed expression of defeat. Defeat was cemented into it with imperishable finality. She asked him about the money for the last time.

'Eh?'

'The money. You took it. What you do with it? That money. Under the mattress.' For the first time she showed some sign of desperation. 'Please, what you done with it? That money. My money?'

'Eh?' And she knew that he could not remember.

V

A day later it was all over. Two days later she pushed the bicycle the four miles to the next village, to see her brother. It Was

springtime, time for the boys to come back to her. Pushing the bicycle in the twilight, she felt she was pushing forward into the future. She had some dim idea, heavily dulled by the sense of Thurlow's death, that the loss of the money was not now so great Money is money death is death ; the living are living. The living were the future. The thought of the boys' return filled her with hopes for the future, unrelated hopes, but quite real, strong enough to surmount the loss of both Thurlow and money.

At her brother's they had nothing to say. They sat, the brother, the mother, and the sister-in-law, and looked at her with eyes over which, as it were, the blinds had been drawn.

'The boys here?' she said.

'They're making a bit' of a wheelbarrow.¹³

'They all right?'

'Yes' He wetted his lips. His clean-planed mind had been scarred by events as though by a mishandled tool. 'They don't know nothing We kept it from 'em. They ain't being to school and they ain't seen no papers. They think he's in jail for stealing money'.

She looked at him dully 'Stealing money? That's what he did do That money I told you about That money I had under the mattress.

'Well,' he said slowly, 'It's done now'.

'What did he do with it?' she said. 'What d'ye reckon he done with it?'

He looked at her quickly, unable suddenly to restrain his anger. 'Done with it? What d'ye suppose he done with it? Spent it. Threw it away. Boozed it. What else? You know what he was like. Yow knew! You had your eyes open. You knew what—'

'Will, Will' his wife said.

He was silent. The old lady said: 'Eh? What's that? What's the matter now?'

The brother said, in a loud voice, 'Nothing.' Then more softly : 'She don't know everything.'

'I came to take the boys back,' Mrs Thurlow said.

He was silent again. He wetted his lips. He struck a match on the warm fire-hob. It spurted into a sudden explosion, igniting of its own volition. He seemed startled. He put the match to his pipe, let it go out.

He looked at Mrs Thurlow, the dead match in his hands. 'The boys ain't coming back no more,' he said.

'Eh ?' she said. She was stunned. 'They ain't what ?'

'They don't want to come back,' he said.

She did not understand. She could not speak. Very slowly he said :

'It's natural they don't want to come back. I know it's hard. But it's natural. They're getting on well here. They want to stop here. They're good boys. I could take 'em into the business.'

She heard him go on without hearing the individual words. He broke off, his face relieved—like a man who has liquidated some awful obligation.

'They're my boys,' she said. 'They got a right to say what they shall do and what they shan't do.'

She spoke heavily, without bitterness.

'I know that,' he said. 'That's right. They got a right to speak. You want to hear what they got to say?'

'Yes, I want to,' she said.

Her sister-in-law went out into the yard at the back of the house. Soon voices drew nearer out of the darkness and the two boys came in.

'Hullo,' she said.

'Hello, Mum,' they said.

'Your Mum's come', the carpenter said, 'to see if you want to go back with her.'

The two boys stood silent, awkward, eyes glancing past her.

‘You want to go?’ the carpenter said. ‘Or do you want to stay here?’

Here, the elder boy said. ‘We want to stop here.’

‘You’re sure o that?’

‘Yes,’ the other said.

Mrs. Thurlow stood silent. She could think of nothing to say in protest or argument or persuasion. Nothing she could say would, she felt, give expression to the inner part of himself the crushed core of optimism and faith.

She stood at the door, looking back at the boys. ‘You made up your minds, then?’ she said. They did not speak.

‘I’ll run you home,’ her brother said.

‘No’, she said. ‘I got my bike.’

She went out of the house and began to push the bicycle slowly home in the darkness. She walked with head down, lumbering painfully, as though direction did not matter. Whereas, coming, she had seemed to be pushing forward into the future, she now felt as if she were pushing forward into nowhere.

After a mile or so she heard a faint hissing from the back tyre. She stopped, pressing the tyre with her hand. ‘It’s slow,’ she thought; ‘It’ll last me.’ She pushed forward. A little later it seemed to her that the hissing got worse. She stopped again, and again felt the tyre with her hand. It was softer now, almost flat.

She unscrewed the pump and put a little air in the tyre and went on. ‘I better stop at the shop,’ she thought, ‘and have it done.’

In the village the cycle-shop was already in darkness. She pushed past it. As she came to the hill leading up to the house she lifted her head a little. It seemed to her suddenly that the house, outlined darkly above the dark hill, was a long way off

She had for one moment an impression that she would never reach it.

She struggled up the hill. The mud of the track seemed to suck at her great boots and hold her down. The wheels of the bicycle seemed as if they would not turn, and she could hear the noise of the air dying once again in the tyre.

THE MARTYR'S CORNER

R. K. NARAYAN

R.K.Narayan (1907–) was born in Madras and educated in Mysore. He is among the pioneering Indian novelists who write in English. His novel, *The Guide*, has been given the Sahitya Akademi Award and been made into a film. Narayan writes with extreme simplicity about the lives and aspirations of average middle and lower-middle class Indians. His simplicity is often touching or poignant—as in this story.

Just at that turning between Market Road and the lane leading to the chemist's shop he had his establishment. If anyone doesn't like the word 'establishment', he is welcome to say so, because it was actually something of a vision spun out of air. At eight you would not see him, and again at ten you would see nothing, but between eight and ten he arrived, sold his goods, and departed.

Those who saw him thus remarked : 'Lucky fellow!' He has hardly an hour's work a day and he pockets ten rupees—what graduates are unable to earn ! Three hundred rupees a month!' He felt irritated when he heard such glib remarks, and said, 'What these folk do not see is that I sit before the oven practically all day frying all this stuff...'

He got up when the cock in the next house crowed; sometimes it had a habit of waking up at three in the morning and letting out a shriek. 'Why has the cock lost its normal sleep?' Rama wondered as he awoke, but it was a signal he could not miss. Whether it was three o' clock or four, it was all the same to him. He had to get up and start his day.

At about 8.15 in the evening he arrived with a load of stuff. He looked as if he had four arms, so many things he carried about him. His equipment was the big tray balanced on his head, with its assortment of edibles, a stool stuck in the crook

of his arm, a lamp in another hand, a couple of portable legs for mounting his tray. He lit the lamp, a lantern which consumed six pies, worth of kerosene every day, and kept it near at hand, since he did not like to depend only upon electricity, having to guard a lot of loose cash and a variety of miscellaneous articles.

When he set up his tray with a little lamp illuminating his display, even a confirmed dyspeptic could not pass by without throwing a look at it. A heap of *bondas*, which seemed puffed and big, but melted in one's mouth, *dosais*, white, round and limp, looking like layers of muslin, *chappatis* so thin that you could lift fifty of them on a little finger, duck's eggs, hard-boiled, resembling a heap of ivory balls, and perpetually boiling coffee on a stove. He had a separate aluminium pot in which he kept *chutney*, which went gratis with almost every item.

He always arrived in time to catch the cinema crowd coming out after the evening show. A pretender to the throne, a young scraggy fellow sat on his spot until he arrived and did business, but our friend did not let that unduly bother him. In fact he felt generous enough to say, 'Let the poor rat do his business when I am not there.' This sentiment was amply respected and the pretender moved off a minute before the arrival of the prince among caterers.

His customers liked him. They said in admiration, 'Is there another place where you can get coffee for six pies and four *chappatis* for an anna?' They sat around his tray, taking what they wanted. A dozen hands hovered about it every minute, because his customers were entitled to pick up, examine and accept their stuff after proper scrutiny.

Though so many hands were probing the lot, he knew exactly who was taking what he knew by an extraordinary sense, which of the *jutka*-drivers was picking up *chappatis* at a given moment; he could even mention his licence number; he knew that the stained hand nervously coming up was that of the youngster who polished the shoes of passers-by; and he knew

exactly at what hour he would see the wrestler's arm searching for the perfect duck's egg, which would be knocked against the tray-corner before consumption.

His custom was drawn from the population swarming the pavement the boot-polish boys, for instance, who wandered to and fro with brush and polish in a bag, endlessly soliciting, 'Polish, sir, polish!' Rama had a soft corner in his heart for the waifs. When he saw some fat customer haggling over the payment to one of these youngsters he felt like shouting, 'Give the poor fellow a little more. Don't grudge it. If you pay an *anna* more he can have a *dosai* and a *chappati*. As it is, the poor fellow is on half-rations and remains half-starving all day.'

It rent his heart to see their hungry, hollow eyes; it pained him to note the rags they wore ; and it made him very unhappy to see the tremendous eagerness with which they came to him, laying aside their brown bags. But what could he do? He could not run a charity show; that was impossible. He measured out their half-glass of coffee correct to the fraction of an inch, but they could cling to the glass as long as they liked.

The blind beggar, who whined for alms all day in front of the big hotel, brought him part of his collection at the end of the day and demanded refreshment... and the grass-selling women. He disliked serving women; their shrill, loud voices got on his nerves. These came to him after disposing of headloads of grass satisfactorily. And that sly fellow with a limp who bought a packet of mixed fare every evening and carried it to a prostitute-like creature standing under a tree on the pavement opposite.

At the coppers that men and women of this part of the universe earned through their miscellaneous jobs ultimately came to him at the end of the day. He put all this money into a little cloth bag, dangling from his neck under his shirt, and carried it home, soon after the night show started in the theatre and when he had satisfied that all his partrons had carried something inside to munch.

He lived in the second lane behind the market. His wife opened the door, throwing into the night air the scent of burnt oil which perpetually hung about their home. She snatched from his hands all his encumbrances, put her hand under his shirt to pull out his cloth bag, and counted the cash immediately. They gloated over it. 'Five rupees invested in the morning has brought us another five...' They ruminated on the exquisite mystery of this multiplication. She put back into his cloth bag the capital for further investment on the morrow, and carefully separated the gains and took them away to a little wooden box that she had brought from her parent's house years before.

After dinner, he tucked a betel leaf and tobacco into his cheek and slept on the pyol of his house, and had dreams of traffic constables bullying him to move on and health inspectors saying that he was spreading all kinds of diseases and depopulating the city. But fortunately in actual life no one bothered him very seriously. He gave an occasional packet of his stuff to the traffic constable going off duty, or to the health department menial who might pass that way.

The health officer no doubt came and said, 'You must put all this under a glass lid, otherwise I shall destroy it all some day... Take care!' But he was a kindly man who did not pursue any matter, but wondered in private, 'How his customers survive his food, I can't understand ! I suppose people build up a sort of immunity to such poisons, with all that dust blowing on it, and the gutter behind ...' Rama no doubt violated all the well-accepted canons of cleanliness and sanitation, but still his customers not only survived his fare but seemed actually to flourish on it, having consumed it for years without showing signs of being any the worse for it.

Rama's life could probably be considered a most satisfactory one, without agitation or heartburn of any kind. Why could it not go on for ever endlessly, till the universe itself cooled off and perished, when by any standard he could be

proved to have led a life of pure effort ? No one was hurt by his activity and money-making, and not many people could be said to have died of taking his stuff; there were no more casualties through his catering than, say through the indifferent municipal administration.

But such security is unattainable in human life. The gods grow jealous of too much contentment anywhere and they show their displeasure all of a sudden. One night, when he arrived as usual at his spot, he found a babbling crowd at the corner where he normally sat. He sat authoritatively, 'Leave way, please.' But no one cared. It was the young shop-boy of the stationer's that plucked his sleeve and said. 'They have been fighting over something since the evening...'

'Over what ?' asked Rama.

'Over something ...' the boy said. 'People say someone was stabbed near the Sales Tax Office when he was distributing notices about some votes or something. It may be a private quarrel. But who cares? Let them fight who want a fight.'

Someone said, 'How dare you speak like that about us ?'

Everyone turned to look at this man sourly. Someone in that crowd remarked, 'Can't a man speak....?'

His neighbour slapped him for it. Rama stood there with his load about him, looking on helplessly. This one slap was enough to set off a fuse. Another man hit another man and then another hit another, and someone started a cry, 'Down with ...'

'Ah, it is as we suspected, pre-planned and organized to crush us ...' another section cried.

People shouted, soda-water bottles were used as missiles. Everyone hit everyone else. A set of persons suddenly entered all the shops and demanded that these be closed. 'Why ?' asked the shopmen. 'How can you have the heart to do business when...?'

The restraints of civilized existence were suddenly

abandoned. Everyone seemed to be angry with everyone else. Within an hour the whole scene looked like a battlefield. Of course the police came on to the spot presently, but this made matters worse, since it provided another side to the fight. The police had a three-fold task, of maintaining law and order and also maintaining themselves intact and protecting some party whom they believed to be injured. Shops that were not closed were looted.

The cinema house suddenly emptied itself of its crowd, which rushed out to enter the fray at various points. People with knives ran about, people with bloodstains groaned and shouted, ambulance vans moved here and there. The police used *lathis* and teargas, and finally opened fire. Many people died. The public said that the casualties were three thousand, but the official communique maintained that only five were injured and four-and-a quarter killed in the police firing. At midnight Rama emerged from hiding place under a culvert and went home.

The next day Rama told his wife, 'I won't take out the usual quantity. I doubt if there will be anyone there. God knows what devil has seized all those folk! They are ready to kill each other for some votes ...' His instinct was right. There were more policemen than public on Market Road and his corner was strongly guarded. He had to set up his shop on a farther spot indicated by a police officer.

Matters returned to normal in about ten days, when all the papers clamoured for a full public enquiry into this or that : whether the firing was justified and what precautions were taken by the police to prevent this flare-up and so on. Rama watched the unfolding of contemporary history through the shouts of newsboys, and in due course tried to return to his corner. The moment he set up his tray and took his seat, a couple of young men wearing badges came to him and said, 'You can't have your shop here.'

'Why not sir?'

‘This is a holy spot on which our leader fell that day. The police aimed their guns at his heart. We are erecting a monument here. This is our place; the municipality have handed this corner to us.’

Very soon this spot was cordoned off, with some congregation or the other always there. Money boxes jingled for collections and people dropped coins. Rama knew better than anyone else how good the place was for attracting money. They collected enough money to set a memorial stone and, with an ornamental fencing and flowerpots, entirely transformed the spot.

Austere, serious-looking persons arrived there and spoke among themselves. Rama had to move nearly two hundred yards away, far into the lane. It meant that he went out of the range of vision of his customers. He fell on their blind-spot. The cinema crowd emerging from the theatre poured away from him; the *jutka*-drivers who generally left their vehicles on the roadside for a moment while the traffic constable showed indulgence and snatched a mouthful, found it inconvenient to come so far; the boot-boys patronized a fellow on the opposite footpath, the scraggy pretender, whose fortunes seemed to be rising.

Nowadays Rama prepared very much less stock each day, but even then he carried home a lot of remnants. He consumed some of these at home, and the rest, on his wife’s advice, he warmed up and brought out for sale again next day. One or two who tasted the stuff retched and spread the rumour that Rama’s quality was not what it used to be. One night, when he went home with just two annas in his bag, he sat up on the pyol and announced to his wife, ‘I believe our business is finished. Let us not think of it any more.’

He put away his pans and trays and his lamp, and prepared himself for a life of retirement. When all his savings were exhausted he went to one Restaurant Kohinoor from which

loud-speakers shrieked all day, and queued up for a job. For twenty rupees a month he waited eight hours a day at the tables. People came and went, the radio music from somewhere frayed his nerves, but he stuck on; he had to. When some customer ordered him about too rudely, he said, 'Gently, brother. I was once a hotel-owner myself.' And with that piece of reminiscence he attained great satisfaction.

ARABY

JAMES JOYCE

North Richmond street, being blind,¹ was a quiet street except at the hour when the Christian Brothers' School set the boys free. An uninhabited house of two stories stood at the blind end, detached from its neighbours in a square ground. The other houses of the street, conscious of decent lives within them, gazed at one another with brown imperturbable faces.

The former tenant of our house, a priest had died in the back drawing-room. Air, musty from having been long enclosed, hung in all the rooms, and the waste² room behind the kitchen was littered with old useless papers. Among these I found a few paper covered books, the pages of which were curled and damp : *The Abbot*, by Walter Scott, *The Devout Communicant* and *The Memoirs of Vidocq*.³ I liked the last best because its leaves were yellow. The wild garden behind the house contained a central apple-tree and a few straggling bushes, under one of which I found the late tenant's rusty bicycle pump. He had been a very charitable priest, in his will he had left all his money to institutions and the furniture of his house to his sister.

When the short days of winter came, dusk fell before we had well eaten our dinners. When we met in the street the houses had grown sombre. The space of sky above us was the colour of ever-changing violet and towards it the lamps of the street lifted their feeble lanterns. The cold air stung us and we played till our bodies glowed. Our shouts echoed in the silent street. The career of our play brought us through the dark muddy lanes behind the houses where we ran the gauntlet of the rough tribes from the cottages, to the back doors of the dark dripping gardens where odours arose from the ashpits,⁴ to the dark odorous stables where a coachman smoothed and

combed the horse or shook music from the buckled harness. When we returned to the street, light from the kitchen windows had filled the areas. If my uncle was seen turning the corner, we hid in the shadow until we had seen him safely housed. Or if Mangan's sister came out on the doorstep to call her brother in to his tea, we watched her from our shadow peer up and down the street. We waited to see whether she would remain or go in and, if she remained, we left our shadow and walked up to Mangan's steps resignedly. She was waiting for us her figure defined by the light from the half opened door. Her brother always teased her before he obeyed and I stood by the railings looking at her. Her dress swung as she moved her body, and the softrope of her hair tossed from side to side.

Every morning I lay on the floor in the front parlour watching her door. The blind was pulled down to within an inch of the sash so that I could not be seen. When she came out on the doorstep my heart leaped. I ran to the hall, seized my books and followed her. I kept her brown figure always in my eye, and, when we came near the point at which our ways diverged, I quickened my pace and passed her. This happened morning after morning. I had never spoken to her except for a few casual words, and yet her name was like a summons to all my foolish blood.

Her image accompanied me even in places the most hostile to romance. On Saturday evenings when my aunt went marketing I had to carry some of the parcels. We walked through the flaring streets, jostled by drunken men and bargaining women, amid the curses of labourers, the shrill litanies of shop-boys who stood on guard by the barrels of pigs' cheeks, the nasal chanting of street-singers, who sang a *come all-you* about O'Donovan Rossa,⁶ or a ballad about the troubles in our native land. These noises converged in a single sensation of life for me : I imagined that I bore my chalice safely through a throng of foes. Her name sprang to my lips at moments in strange prayers and praises which I myself did not understand.

My eyes were often full of tears (I could not tell why) and at times a flood from my heart seemed to pour itself out into my bosom. I thought little of the future. I did not know whether I would ever speak to her or not or, if I spoke to her, how I could tell her of my confused adoration. But my body was like a harp and her words and gestures were like fingers running upon the wires.

One evening I went into the back drawing-room in which the priest had died. It was a dark rainy evening and there was no sound in the house. Through one of the broken panes I heard the rain impinge upon the earth, the fine incessant needles of water playing in the sodden beds. Some distant lamp or lighted window gleamed below me. I was thankful that I could see so little. All my senses seemed to desire to veil themselves and, feeling that I was about the slip from them, I pressed the palms of my hands together until they trembled, murmuring : *O love! O love!* many times.

At last she spoke to me. When she addressed the first words to me I was so confused that I did not know what to answer. She asked me was I going to *Araby*.⁷ I forgot whether I answered yes or no. It would be a splendid bazaar, she said; she would love to go.

And why can't you? I asked.

While she spoke she turned a silver bracelet round and round her wrist. She could not go, she said, because there would be a retreat that week in her convent.⁸ Her brother and two other boys were fighting for their caps, and I was alone at the railings. She held one of the spikes, bowing her head towards me. The light from the lamp opposite our door caught the white curve of her neck, lit up her hair that rested there and, falling, lit up the hand upon the railing. It fell over one side of her dress and caught the white border of a petticoat, just visible as she stood at ease.

—It's well for you, she said.

—If I go, I said, I will bring you something.

What innumerable follies laid waste my waking and sleeping thoughts after that evening ! I wished to annihilate the tedious intervening days. I chafed against the work of school. At night in my bedroom and by day in the classroom her image came between me and the page I strove to read. The syllables of the word *Araby* were called to me through the silence in which my soul luxuriated and cast an Eastern enchantment over me. I asked for leave to go to the bazaar on Saturday night. My aunt was surprised, and hoped it was not some Freemason affair.⁹ I answered few questions in class. I watched my master's face pass from amiability to sternness: he hoped I was not beginning to idle. I could not call my wandering thoughts together. I had hardly any patience with the serious work of life which, now that it stood between me and my desire, seemed to me child's play, ugly monotonous child's play.

On Saturday morning I reminded my uncle that I wished to go to the bazar in the evening. He was fussing at the hallstand, looking for the hat-brush, and answered me curtly :

—Yes, boy, I know.

As he was in the hall I could not go into the front parlour and lie at the window. I left the house in bad humour and walked slowly towards the school, the air was pitilessly raw and already my heart misgave me.

When I came home to dinner my uncle had not yet been home. Still it was early. I sat staring at the clock for some time and, when its ticking began to irritate me, I left the room, I mounted the staircase and gained the upper part of the house. The high, cold, empty, gloomy rooms liberated me and I went from room to room singing. From the front window I saw my companions playing below in the street. Their cries reached me weakened and indistinct and, leaning my forehead against the cool glass, I looked over at the dark house where she lived. I

may have stood there for an hour, seeing nothing but the brown-clad figure cast by my imagination, touched discreetly by the lamplight at the curved neck, at the hand upon the railings and at the border below the dress.

When I came downstairs again I found Mrs. Mercer sitting at the fire. She was an old, garrulous woman, a pawn-broker's widow, who collected used stamps for some pious purpose. I had to endure the gossip of the tea-tables. The meal was prolonged beyond an hour and still my uncle did not come. Mrs Mercer stood up to go she was sorry she couldn't wait any longer, but it was after eight o'clock and she did not like to be out late, as the night air was bad for her. When she had gone I began to walk up and down the room, clenching my fists. My aunt said :

—I'm afraid you may put off your bazaar for this night of Our Lord.

At nine o'clock I heard my uncle's latchkey in the hall door. I heard him talking to himself and heard the hall-stand rocking when it had received the weight of his overcoat. I could interpret these signs. When he was midway through his dinner I asked him to give me the money to go the bazaar. He had forgotten.

—The people are in bed and after their first sleep now, he said.

I did not smile. My aunt said to him energetically :

—Can't you give him the money and let him go ? You've kept him late enough as it is.

My uncle said he was very sorry he had forgotten. He said he believed in the old saying : *All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy*. He asked me where I was going and, when I had told him a second time, he asked me did I know The Arab's Farewell to his Steed.¹¹ When I left the kitchen he was about to recite the opening lines of the piece to my aunt.

I held a florin tightly in my hand as I strode down

Buckingham Street towards the station. The sight of the streets thronged with buyers and glaring with gas recalled to me the purpose of my journey. I took my seat in a third-class carriage of a deserted train. After an intolerable delay the train moved out of the station slowly. It crept onward among ruinous houses and over the twinkling river. At Westland Row Station a crowd of people pressed to the carriage doors : but the porters moved them back, saying that it was a special train for the bazaar. I remained alone in the bare carriage. In a few minutes the train drew up beside an improvised wooden platform. I passed out on to the road and saw by the lighted dial of a clock that it was ten minutes to ten. In front of me was a large building which displayed the magical name.

I could not find any sixpenny entrance and, fearing that the bazaar would be closed, I passed in quickly through a turnstile, handing a shilling to a weary-looking man. I found myself in a big hall girded at half its height by a gallery. Nearly all the stalls were closed and the greater part of the hall was in darkness. I recognized a silence like that which pervades a church after a service. I walked into the centre of the bazaar timidly. A few people were gathered about the stalls which were still open. Before a curtain, over which the words *Cafe Chantant*.¹² were written in coloured lamps, two men were counting money on a salver. I listened to the fall of the coins.

Remembering with difficulty why I had come, I went over to one of the stalls and examined porcelain vases and flowered tea-sets. At the door of the stall a young lady was talking and laughing with two young gentlemen. I remarked their English accents and listened vaguely to their conversation.

—O, I never said such a thing!

—O, but you did!

—O, but I didn't!

—Didn't she say that ?

— Yes I heard her.

—O, there's a...fib!

Observing me, the young lady came over and asked me did I wish to buy anything. The tone of her voice was not encouraging ; she seemed to have spoken to me out of a sense of duty. I looked humbly at the great jars that stood like eastern guards at either side of the dark entrance to the stall and murmured :

—No, thank you.

The young lady changed the position of one of the vases and went back to the two young men. They began to talk of the same subject. Once or twice the young lady glanced at me over her shoulder.

I lingered before her stall, though I knew my stay was useless, to make my interest in her wares seem the more real. Then I turned away slowly and walked down the middle of the bazaar. I allowed the two pennies to fall against the sixpence in my pocket. I heard a voice call from one end of the gallery that the light was out. The upper part of the hall was now completely dark.

Gazing up into the darkness I saw myself a creature driven and derided by vanity; and my eyes burned with anguish and anger.

THE FLY

KATHERINE MANSFIELD

'Y' are very snug in here,' piped old Mr. Woodifield, and he peered out of the great green-leather armchair by his friend the boss's desk as a baby peers out of its pram. His talk was over; it was time for him to be off, But he did not want to go. Since he had retired since his.. stroke, the wife and the girls kept him boxed up in the house every day of the week except Tuesday. On Tuesday he was dressed and brushed and allowed to cut back to the City¹ for the day. Though what he did there the wife and girls couldn't imagine. Made a nuisance of himself to his friends they supposed ... Well, perhaps so. All the same. We cling to our last pleasures as the tree clings to its last leaves. So there sat old Woodifield, smoking a cigar and staring almost greedily at the boss, who rolled in his office chair, stout, rosy, five years older than he, and still going strong, still at the helm. It did one good to see him.

Wistfully, admiringly, the old voice added, 'It's snug in here, upon my word!'

'Yes, it's comfortable enough,' agreed the boss, and he flipped the *Financial Times* with a paper-knife. As a matter of fact he was proud of his room; he liked to have it admired, especially by old Woodifield. It gave him a feeling of deep, solid satisfaction to be planted there in the midst of it in full view of that frail old figure in the muffler.

'I've had it done up lately,' he explained, as he had explained for the past—how many?—Weeks, 'New carpet,' and he pointed to the bright red carpet with a pattern of large white rings. 'New furniture,' and he nodded towards the massive bookcase and table with legs like twisted treacle. 'Electric heating!' He waved almost exultantly towards the five transparent, pearly sausages glowing so softly in the tilted copper pan.

But he did not draw old Woodifield's attention to the photograph over the table of a grave-looking boy in uniform² standing in one of those spectral photographers' parks with photographers' storm-clouds behind him. It was not new. It had been there for over six years.

'There was something I wanted to tell you,' said old Woodifield, and his eyes grew dim remembering. 'Now what was it? I had it in my mind when I started out this morning.' His hands began to tremble, and patches of red showed above his beard.

Poor old chap, he's on his last pins, thought the boss. And, feeling kindly, he winked at the old man, and said jokingly, 'I tell you what.. I've got a little drop of something here that'll do you good before you go out into the cold again. It's beautiful stuff. It wouldn't hurt a child.' He took a key off his watch-chain, unlocked a cupboard below his desk, and drew forth a dark, squat bottle. 'That's the medicine,' said he.

'And the man from whom I got it told me on the strict Q.T.³ it came from the cellars at Windsor Castle.'⁴

Old Woodifield's mouth fell open at the sight. He couldn't have looked more surprised if the boss had produced a rabbit.

'It's whisky ain't it?' he piped feebly.

The boss turned the bottle and lovingly showed him the label. Whisky it was.

'D'you know,' said he, peering up at the boss wonderingly, 'they won't let me touch it at home.' And he looked as though he was going to cry.

'Ah, that's where we know a bit more than the ladies,' cried the boss, swooping across for two tumblers that stood on the table with the water-bottle, and pouring a generous finger into each. 'Drink it down. It'll do you good. And don't put any water with it. It's sacrilege to tamper with the stuff like this. Ah' He tossed off his, pulled out his handkerchief, hastily wiped his

moustaches, and cocked an eye at old Woodifield, who was rolling his in his chaps.

The old man swallowed, was silent a moment, and then said faintly, 'It's nutty!'

But it warmed him; it crept into his chill old brain—he remembered.

'That was it', he said, heaving himself out of his chair. 'I thought you'd like to know. The girls were in Belgium last week having a look at poor Reggie's grave, and they happened to come across your boy s They're quite near each other it seems.'

Old Woodifield paused but the boss made no reply Only a quiver in his eyelids showed that he heard

'The girls were delighted with the way the place is kept,' piped the old voice. 'Beautifully looked after. Couldn't be better if they were at home. You've not been across, have yer?.'

'No, no!' For various reasons the boss had not been across.

'There's miles of it,' quavered old Woodifield, 'and it's all as neat as a garden. Flowers growing on all the graves. Nice broad paths ' It was plain from his voice how much he liked a nice broad path.

The pause came again. Then the old man brightened wonderfully.

'D' you know what the hotel made the girls pay for a pot of jam?' he piped Ten francs! Robbery, I call it. It was a little pot so Gertrude says, no bigger than a half-crown And she hadn't taken more than a spoonful when they charged her ten francs. Gertrude brought the pot away with her to teach' em a lesson Quite right' too; it's trading on our feelings. They think because we're over there having a look round we're ready to pay anything That's what it is.' And he turned towards the door.

Quite right, quite right!' cried the boss, though what was quite right he hadn't the least idea. He came round by his desk

followed the shuffling footsteps to the door, and saw the old fellow out. Woodifield was gone.

For a long moment the boss stayed, staring at nothing, while the grey-haired office messenger, watching him, dodged in and out of his cubby-hole like a dog that expects to be taken for a run. Then : 'I'll see nobody for half an hour, Macey,' said the boss. 'Understand? Nobody at all.'

'Very good, Sir.'

The door shut, the firm heavy steps recrossed the bright carpet, the fat body plumped down in the spring chair, and leaning forward, the boss covered his face with his hands. He wanted, he intended, he had arranged to weep ...

It had been a terrible shock to him when old Woodifield sprang that remark upon him about the boy's grave. It was exactly as though the earth had opened and he had seen the boy lying there with Woodifield's girls staring down at him. For it was strange. Although over six years had passed away, the boss never thought of the boy except as lying unchanged, unblemished in his uniform, asleep for ever. 'My son!' groaned the boss. But no tears came yet. In the past in the first months and even years after the boy's death, he had only to say those words to be overcome by such grief that nothing short of a violent fit of weeping could relieve him. Time, he had declared then, lie had told everybody, could make no difference. Other men perhaps might recover, might live their loss down, but not he. How was it possible? His boy was an only son. Ever since his birth the boss had worked at building up this business for him; it had no other meaning if it was not for the boy. Life itself had come to have no other meaning. How on earth could he have slaved, denied himself, kept going all those years without the promise for ever before him of the boy's stepping into his shoes and carrying on where he left off?

And that promise had been so near being fulfilled. The boy had been in the office learning the ropes for a year before the

war. Every morning they had started off together; they had come back by the same train. And what congratulations he had received as the boy's father! No wonder; he had taken to it marvellously. As to his popularity with the staff, every man jack⁵ of them down to old Macey couldn't make enough of the boy. And he wasn't in the least spoilt. No, he was just his bright nat-ural self, with the right word for everybody, with that boyish look and his habit of saying, 'Simply splendid!'

But all that was over and done with as though it never had been. The day had come when Macey had handed him the telegram that brought the whole place crashing about his head. 'Deeply regret to inform you...' and he had left the office a broken man, with his life in ruins.

Six years ago, six years.. How quickly time passed! It might have happened yesterday. The boss took his hands from his face: he was puzzled. Something seemed to be wrong with him. He wasn't feeling as he wanted to feel. He decided to get up and have a look at the boy's photograph. But it wasn't a favourite photograph of his; the expression was unnatural. It was cold, even stern-looking. The boy had never looked like that.

At that moment the boss noticed that a fly had fallen into his broad inkpot, and was trying feebly but desperately to clamber out again. Help ! help ! said those struggling legs. But the sides of the inkpot were wet and slippery; it fell back again and began to swim. The boss took up a pen, picked the fly out of the ink, and shook it on to a pice of blotting-paper. For a fraction of a second it lay still on the dark patch that oozed round it. Then the front legs waved, took hold, and, pulling its small sodden body up, it began the immense task of cleaning the ink from its wings. Over and under, over and under went a leg along a wing as the stone goes over and under the scythe. Then there was a pause, while the fly, seeming to stand on the tips of its toes, tried to expand first one wing and then the other. It succeeded at last, and sitting down, it began, like a minute

cat, to clean its face. Now one could imagine that the little front legs rubbed against each other lightly, joyfully. The horrible danger was over, it has escaped; it was ready for life again.

But just then the boss had an idea. He plunged his pen back into the ink, leaned his thick wrist on the blotting-paper, and as the fly tried its wings down came a great a heavy blot. What would it make of that? What indeed ! the little beggar seemed absolutely cowed, stunned, and afraid to move because of what would happen next. But then, as if painfully, it dragged itself forward. The front legs waved, caught hold, and, more slowly this time, the task began from the beginning.

He's a plucky little devil, thought the boss, and he felt a real admiration for the fly's courage. That was the way to tackle things; that was the right spirit. Never say die; it was only a question of... But the fly had again finished its laborious task, and the boss had just time to refill his pen, to shake fair and square on the new-cleaned body yet another dark drop. What about it this time ? A painful moment of suspense followed. But behold, the front legs were again waving; the boss felt a rush of relief. He leaned over the fly and said to it tenderly. 'You artful little b...' And he actually had the brilliant notion of breathing on it to help the drying process. All the same, there was something timid and weak about its efforts now, and the boss decided that this time should be the last, as he dipped the pen deep into the ink-pot.

It was. The last bolt fell on the soaked blotting-paper, and the dragged fly lay in it and did not stir. The back legs were stuck to the body; the front legs were not to be seen.

'Come on,' said the boss. 'Look sharp!' And he stirred it with his pen—in vain. Nothing happened or was likely to happen. The fly was dead.

The boss lifted the corpse on the end of the paper-knife and flung it into the waste paper basket. But such a grinding feeling of wretchedness seized him that he felt positively frightened. He started forward and pressed the bell for Macey.

‘Bring me some fresh blotting paper,’ he said sternly, ‘and look sharp about it.’ And while the old dog padded away he fell to wondering what it was he had been thinking about before. What was it ? It was ... He took out his handkerchief and passed it inside his collar. For the life of him he could not remember.

ON LOVE

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

WHAT is love? Ask him who lives, what is life? Ask him who adores, what is God?

I know not the internal constitution of other men, nor even thine, whom I now address. I see that in some external attributes they resemble me, but when, misled by that appearance, I have thought to appeal to something in common, and unburthen my inmost soul to them, I have found my language misunderstood, like one in a distant and savage land. The more opportunities they have afforded me for experience, the wider has appeared the interval between us, and to a greater distance have the points of sympathy been withdrawn. With a spirit ill-fitted to sustain such proof, trembling and feeble through its tenderness, I have everywhere sought sympathy and have found only repulse and disappointment.

Thou demandest what is love? It is that powerful attraction towards all that we conceive, or fear, or hope beyond ourselves, when we find within our own thoughts the chasm of an insufficient void, and seek to awaken in all things that are a community with what we experience within ourselves. If we reason, we would be understood; if we imagine, we would that the airy children of our brain were born anew within another's; if we feel, we would that another's nerves should vibrate to our own, that the beams of their eyes should kindle at once and mix and melt into our own, that lips of motionless ice should not reply to lips quivering and burning with the heart's best blood. This is Love. This is the bond and the sanction which connects not only man with man, but with everything which exists. We are born into the world, and there is something within us which, from the instant that we live, more and more thirsts after its likeness. It is probably in correspondence with this law that the infant drains milk from the bosom of its

mother; this propensity develops itself with the development of our nature. We dimly see within our intellectual nature a miniature as it were of our entire self, yet deprived of all that we condemn or despise, the ideal prototype of everything excellent or lovely that we are capable of conceiving as belonging to the nature of man. Not only the portrait of our external being, but an assemblage of the minutest particles of which our nature is composed; * a mirror whose surface reflects only the forms of purity and brightness; a soul within our soul that describes a circle around its proper paradise, which pain, and sorrow, and evil dare not overleap. To this we eagerly refer all sensations, thirsting that they should resemble or correspond with it. The discovery of its antitype; the meeting with an understanding capable of clearly estimating our own; an imagination which should enter into and seize upon the subtle and delicate peculiarities which we have delighted to cherish and unfold in secret; with a frame whose nerves, like the chords of two exquisite lyres, strung to the accompaniment of one delightful voice, vibrate with the vibrations of our own; and of a combination of all these in such proportion as the type within demands; this is the invisible and unattainable point to which Love tends : and to attain which, it urges forth the powers of man to arrest the faintest shadow of that, without the possession of which there is no rest nor respite to the heart over which it rules. Hence in solitude, or in that deserted state when we are surrounded by human beings, and yet they sympathize not with us, we love the flowers, the grass, and the waters, and the sky. In the motion of the very leaves of spring, in the blue air, there is then found a secret correspondence with our heart. There is eloquence in the tongueless wind, and a melody in the flowing brooks and the rustling of the reeds beside them, which by their inconceivable relation to something

* These words are ineffectual and metaphorical. Most words are so—No help!

within the soul, awaken the spirits to a dance of breathless rapture, and bring tears of mysterious tenderness to the eyes, like the enthusiasm of patriotic success, or the voice of one beloved singing to you alone. Sterne says that, if he were in a desert, he would love some cypress. So soon as this want or power is dead, man becomes the living sepulchre of himself, and what yet survives is the mere husk of what once he was.

LONDON 1802**WILLIAM WORDSWORTH**

MILTON! thou shouldst be living at this hour.
England hath need of thee: she is a fen
Of stagnant waters; altar, sword, and pen,
Fireside, the heroic wealth of hall and bower,
Have forfeited their ancient English dower
Of inward happiness. We are selfish men:
Oh! raise us up, return to us again!
And give us manners, virtue, freedom, power.
Thy soul was like a Star, and dwelt apart:
Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea,
Pure as the naked heavens, majestic, free.
So didst thou travel on life's common way
In cheerful godliness; and yet thy heart
The lowliest duties on herself did lay.

THE STOLEN CHILD

WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS

WHERE dips the rocky highland
Of Sleuth Wood in the lake,
There lies a leafy island
Where flapping herons wake
The drowsy water-rats;
There we've hid our faery vats,
Full of berries
And of reddest stolen cherries.
Come away, OS human child!
To the waters and the wild
With a faery, hand in hand,
For the world's more full of weeping than you
can understand.

Where the wave of moonlight glosses
The dim grey sands with light,
Far off by furthest Rosses
We foot it all the night,
Weaving olden dances,
Mingling hands and mingling glances
Till the moon has taken flight;
To and fro we leap
And chase the frothy bubbles,
While the world is full of troubles
And is anxious in its sleep.
Come away, O human child!
To the waters and the wild

With a faery, hand in hand,
For the world's more full of weeping than you
can understand.

Where the wandering water gushes
From the hills above Glen-Car,
In pools among the rushes
That scarce could bathe a star,
We seek for slumbering trout
And whispering in their ears
Give them unquiet dreams;
Leaning softly out
From ferns that drop their tears
Over the young streams.
Come away, O human child!
To the waters and the wild
With a faery, hand in hand,
For the world's more full of weeping than you
can understand.

Away with us he's going,
The solemn-eyed:
He'll hear no more the lowing
Of the calves on the warm hillside
Or the kettle on the hob
Sing peace into his breast,
Or see the brown mice bob
Round and round the oatmeal-chest.
For he comes, the human child,
To the waters and the wild
With a faery, hand in hand,
From a world more full of weeping than you
can understand.

ANTHEM FOR DOOMED YOUTH

WILFRED OWEN

What passing-bells for those who die as cattle?

Only the monstrous anger of the guns.

Only the stuttering rifles' rapid rattle

Can patter out their hasty orisons.

No mockeries now for them; no prayers nor bells;

Nor any voice of mourning save the choirs,—

The shrill, demented choirs of wailing shells;

And bugles calling for them from sad shires.

What candles may be held to speed them all?

Not in the hands of boys but in their eyes

Shall shine the holy glimmers of goodbyes.

The pallor of girls' brows shall be their pall;

Their flowers the tenderness of patient minds,

And each slow dusk a drawing-down of blinds.

THE LAGOON

JOSEPH CONRAD

The white man leaning with both arms over the roof of the little house in the stern of the boat, said to the steersman—

‘We will pass the night in Arsat’s clearing. It is late.’

The Malay only grunted, and went on looking fixedly at the river. The white man rested his chin on his crossed arms and gazed at the wake of the boat. At the end of the straight avenue of forests cut by the intense glitter of the river, the sun appeared unclouded and dazzling, poised low over the water that shone smoothly like a band of metal. The forests, sombre and dull, stood motionless and silent on each side of the broad stream. At the foot of big, towering trees, trunkless nipa palms rose from the mud of the bank, in bunches of leaves enormous and heavy, that hung unstirring over the brown swirl of eddies. In the stillness of the air every tree, every leaf, every bough, every tendril of creeper and every petal of minute blossoms seemed to have been bewitched into an immobility perfect and final. Nothing moved on the river but the eight paddles that rose flashing regularly, dipped together with a single splash; while the steersman swept right and left with a periodic and sudden flourish of his blade describing a glinting semicircle above his head. The churned-up water frothed alongside with a confused murmur. And the white man’s canoe, advancing upstream in the short-lived disturbance of its own making seemed to enter the portals of a land from which the very memory of motion had forever departed.

The white man, turning his back upon the setting sun, looked along the empty and broad expanse of the sea-reach. For the last three miles of its course the wandering, hesitating river, as if enticed irresistibly by the freedom of an open horizon, flows straight into the sea, flows straight to the east—to the east that harbours both light and darkness. Astern of the

boat the repeated call of some bird, a cry discordant and feeble, skipped along over the smooth water and lost itself, before it could reach the other shore, in the breathless silence of the world.

The steersman dug his paddle into the stream, and held hard with stiffened arms, his body thrown forward. The water gurgled aloud; and suddenly the long straight reach seemed to pivot on its centre, the forests swung in a semicircle, and the slanting beams of sunset touched the broadside of the canoe with a fiery glow, throwing the slender and distorted shadows of its crew upon the streaked glitter of the river. The white man turned to look ahead. The course of the boats had been altered at right-angles to the stream, and the carved dragon-head of its prow was pointing now at a gap in the fringing bushes of the bank. It glided through, brushing the overhanging twigs, and disappeared from the river like some slim and amphibious creature leaving the water for its lair in the forests.

The narrow creek was like a ditch : tortuous, fabulously deep; filled with gloom under the thin strip of pure and shining blue of the heaven. Immense trees soared up, invisible behind the festooned draperies of creepers. Here and there, near the glistening blackness of the water, a twisted root of some tall tree showed amongst the tracery of small ferns, black and dull, writhing and motionless, like an arrested snake. The short words of the paddlers reverberated loudly between the thick and sombre walls of vegetation. Darkness oozed out from between the trees, through the tangled maze of the creepers, from behind the great fantastic and unstirring leaves; the darkness, mysterious and invincible; the darkness scented and poisonous of impenetrable forests.

The men poled in the shoaling water. The creek broadened, opening out into a wide sweep of a stagnant lagoon. The forests receded from the marshy bank, leaving a level strip of bright green, reedy grass to frame the reflected blueness of the sky. A fleecy pink cloud drifted high above, trailing the delicate

colouring of its image under the floating leaves and the silvery blossoms of the lotus. A little house, perched on high piles, appeared black in the distance. Near it, two tall nibong palms, that seemd to have come out of the forests in the background, leaned slightly over the ragged roof, with a suggestion of sad tenderness and care in the droop of their leafy and soaring heads.

The steersman, pointing with his paddle, said, 'Arsat is there. I see his canoe fast between the piles.'

The polers ran along the sides of the boat glancing over their shoulders at the end of the day's journey. They would have preferred to spend the night somewhere else than on this lagoon of weird aspect and ghostly reputation. Moreover, they disliked Arsat, first as a stranger, and also because he who repairs a ruined house, and dwells in it, proclaims that he is not afraid to live amongst the spirits that haunt the places abandoned by mankind. Such a man can disturb the course of fate by glances or words; while his familiar ghosts are not easy to propitiate by casual wayfarers upon whom long to wreak the malice of their human master. White men care not for such things, being unbelievers and in league with the Father of Evil,* who leads them unharmed through the invisible dangers of this world. To the warnings of the righteous they oppose an offensive pretence of disbelief. What is there to be done?

So they thought, throwing their weight on the end of their long poles. The big canoe glided on swiftly, noiselessly, and smoothly, towards Arsat's clearing, till, in a great rattling of poles thrown down and the loud murmurs of 'Allah be praised!' it came with a gentle knock against piles below the house.

The boatmen with uplifted faces shouted discordantly, 'Arsat! O Arsat!' Nobody came. The white man began to climb the rude ladder giving access to the bamboo platform before the house. The juragan² of the boat said sulkily, 'We will cook in the sampan, and sleep on the water.'

'Pass my blankets and the basket,' said the white man, curtly.

He knelt on the edge of the platform to receive the bundle. Then the boat shoved off, and the white man, standing up, confronted Arsath, who had come out through the low door of his hut. He was a man young, powerful, with broad chest and muscular arms. He had nothing on but his sarong. His head was bare. His big, soft eyes stared eagerly at the white man, but his voice and demeanour were composed as he asked, without any words of greeting—

'Have you medicine, Tuan ?'

'No,' said the visitor in a startled tone. 'No. Why? Is there sickness in the house?'

'Enter and see,' replied Arsath, in the same calm manner, and turning short round, passed again through the small doorway. The white man, dropping his bundles, followed.

In the dim light of the dwelling he made out on a couch of bamboos a woman stretched on her back under a broad sheet of red cotton cloth. She lay still, as if dead; but her big eyes, wide open, glittered in the gloom, staring upwards at the slender rafters, motionless and unseeing. She was in a high fever, and evidently unconscious. Her cheeks were sunk slightly, her lips were partly open, and on the young face there was the ominous and fixed expression—the absorbed, contemplating expression of the unconscious who are going to die. The two men stood looking down at her in silence.

'Has she been long ill ?' asked the traveller.

'I have not slept for five nights,' answered the Malay, in a deliberate tone. 'At first she heard voices calling her from the water and struggled against me who held her. But since the sun of today rose she hears nothing—she hears not me. She sees nothing. She sees not me—me!'

He remained silent for a minute, then asked softly—

'Tuan, will she die ?'

'I fear so,' said the white man, sorrowfully. He had known Arsath years ago, in a far country in times of trouble and danger, when no friendship is to be despised. And since his Malay friend had come unexpectedly to dwell in the hut on the lagoon with strange woman, he had slept many times there, in his journeys up and down the river. He liked the man who knew how to keep faith in council and how to fight without fear by the side of his white friend. He liked him—not so much perhaps as a man likes his favourite dog—but still he liked him well enough to help and ask no questions, to think sometimes vaguely and hazily in the midst of his own pursuits, about the lonely man and the long-haired woman with audacious face and triumphant eyes, who lived together hidden by the forests—alone and feared.

The white man came out of the hut in time to see the enormous conflagration of sunset put out by the swift and stealthy shadows that, rising like a black and impalpable vapour above the tree-tops, spread over the heaven, extinguishing the crimson glow of floating clouds and the red brilliance of departing daylight. In a few moments all the stars came out above the intense blackness of the earth and the great lagoon gleaming suddenly with reflected lights resembled an oval patch of night sky flung down into the hopeless and anysmal night of the wilderness. The white man had some supper out of the basket, then collecting a few sticks that lay about the platform, made up a small fire, not for warmth, but for the sake of the smoke, which would keep off the mosquitos. He wrapped himself in the blankets and sat with his back against the reed against of the house, smoking thoughtfully.

Arsath came through the doorway with noiseless steps and squatted down by the fire. The white man moved his outstretched legs a little.

'She breathes,' said Arsath in a low voice, anticipating the expected question. 'She breathes and burns as if with a great fire. She speaks not; she hears not—and burns!'

He paused for a moment, then asked in a quiet, incurious tone—

‘Tuan ... will she die?’

The white man moved his shoulders uneasily and muttered in a hesitating manner—

‘If such is her fate.’

‘No, Tuan,’ said Arsat, calmly. ‘If such is my fate. I hear, I see, I wait. I remember ... Tuan, do you remember the old days? Do you remember my brother?’

‘Yes,’ said the white man. The Malay rose suddenly and went in. The other, sitting still outside, could hear the voice in the hut. Arsat said: ‘Hear me! Speak!’ His words were succeeded by a complete silence. ‘O Diamelen!’ he cried, suddenly. After that cry there was a deep sigh. Arsat came out and sank down again in his old place.

They sat in silence before the fire. There was no sound within the house, there was no sound near them; but far away on the lagoon they could hear the voices of the boatmen ringing fitful and distinct on the calm water. The fire in the bows of the sampan shone faintly in the distances with a hazy red glow. Then it died out. The voices ceased. The land and the water slept invisible, unstirring and mute. It was as though there had been nothing left in the world but glitter of stars streaming, ceaseless and vain through the black stillness of the night.

The white man gazed straight before him into the darkness with wide-open eyes. The fear and fascination, the inspiration and the wonder of death—of death near, unavoidable, and unseen, soothed the unrest of his race and stirred the most indistinct, the most intimate of his thoughts. The ever-ready suspicion of evil, the gnawing suspicion that lurks in our hearts, flowed out into the stillness round him—into the stillness profound and dumb, and made it appear untrustworthy and infamous, like the placid and impenetrable mask of an unjustifiable violence. In that fleeting and powerful disturbance

of his being the earth enfolded in the starlight peace became a shadowy country of inhuman strife, a battle-field of phantoms terrible and charming, august or ignoble, struggling ardently for the possession of our helpless hearts. An unquiet and mysterious country of inextinguishable desires and fears.

A plaintive murmur rose in the night; a murmur saddening and startling, as if the great solitudes of surrounding woods had tried to whisper into his ear the wisdom of their immense and lofty indifference. Sounds hesitating and vague floated in the air round him, shaped themselves slowly into words; and at last flowed on gently in a murmuring stream of soft and monotonous sentences. He stirred like a man waking up and changed his position slightly. Arsat, motionless and shadowy, sitting with bowed head under the stars, was speaking in a low and dreamy tone—

‘... for where can we lay down the heaviness of our trouble but in a friend’s heart? A man must speak of war and of love. You, Tuan, know what war is, and you have seen me in time of danger seek death as other men seek life! A writting may be lost; a lie may be written; but what the eye has seen is truth and remains in the mind!’

‘I remember,’ said the white man, quietly. Arsat went on with mournful composure

‘Therefore I shall speak to you of love. Speak in the night. Speak before both night and love are gone—and the eye of day looks upon my sorrow and my shame; upon my blackened face; upon my burnt-up heart.’

A sigh, short and faint, marked an almost imperceptible pause, and then his words flowed on, without a stir, without a gesture.

‘After the time of trouble and war was over and you went away from my country in the pursuit of your desires, which we, men of the islands, cannot understand, I and my brother became again, as we had been before, the sword-bearers of the

Ruler. You know we were men of family, belonging to a ruling race, and more fit than any to carry on our right shoulder the emblem of power. And in the time of prosperity Si Dendring showed us favour, as we, in time of sorrow, had showed to him the faithfulness of our courage. It was a time of peace. A time of deer-hunts and cock-fights; of idle talks and foolish squabbles between men whose bellies are full and weapons are rusty. But the sower watched the young rice-shoots grow up without fear, and the traders came and went, departed lean and returned fat into the river of peace. They brought news, too. Brought lies and truth mixed together, so that no man knew when to rejoice and when to be sorry. We heard from them about you also. They had seen you here and had seen you there. And I was glad to hear, for I remembered the stirring times, and I always remembered you, Tuan, till the time came when my eyes could see nothing in the past, because they had looked upon the one who is dying there—in the house.'

He stopped to exclaim in an intense whisper. 'O Mara bahia!³ O Calamity!' then went on speaking a little louder:

'There's no worse enemy and no better friend than a brother, Tuan, for one brother knows another, and in perfect knowledge is strength for good or evil. I loved my brother. I went to him and told him that I could see nothing but one face, hear nothing but one voice. He told me: "Open your heart so that she can see what is in it—and wait. Patience is wisdom. Inchi Midah⁴ may die or our Ruler may throw off his fear of a woman!" ... I waited! ... You remember the lady with the veiled face, Tuan, and the fear of our Ruler before her cunning and temper. And if she wanted her servant, what could I do? But I fed the hunger of my heart on short glances and stealthy words. I loitered on the path to the bath-house in the daytime, and when the sun had fallen behind the forest I crept along the jasmine hedges of the women's courtyard. Unseeing, we spoke to one another through the scent of flowers, through the veil of leaves, through the blades of long grass that stood

still before our lips; so great was our prudence, so faint was the murmur of our great longing. The time passed swiftly... and there were whisper amongst women—and our enemies watched—my brother was gloomy, and I began to think of killing and of a fierce death ... We are of a people who take what they want—like you whites. There is a time when a man should forget loyalty and respect. Might and authority are given to rulers, but to all men is given love and strength and courage. My brother said, “You shall take her from their midst. We are two who are like one.” And I answered, “Let it be soon, for I find no warmth in sunlight that does not shine upon her.” Our time came when the Ruler and all the great people went to the mouth of the river to fish by torchlight. There were hundreds of boats, and on the white sand, between the water and the forests, dwellings of leaves were built for the households of the Rajahs. The smoke of cooking-fires was like a blue mist of the evening, and many voices rang in it joyfully. While they were making the boats ready to beat up the fish, my brother came to me and said, “Tonight!” I looked to my weapons, and when the time came our canoe took its place in the circle of boats carrying the torches. The lights blazed on the water, but behind the boats there was darkness. When the shouting began and the excitement made them like mad we dropped out. The water swallowed our fire, and we floated back to the shore that was dark with only here and there the glimmer of embers. We could hear the talk of slave-girls amongst the sheds. Then we found a place deserted and silent. We waited there. She came. She came running along the shore, rapid and leaving no trace, like a leaf driven by the wind into the sea. My brother said gloomily, “Go and take her; carry her into our boat.” I lifted her in my arms. She panted. Her heart was beating against my breast. I said, “I take you from those people. You came to the cry of my heart, but my arms take you into my boat against the will of the great!” “It is right,” said my brother. “We are men who take what we want and can hold it against many. We

should have taken her in daylight." I said, "Let us be off"; for since she was in my boat I began to think of our Ruler's many men. "Yes. Let us be off," said my brother. "We are cast out and this boat is our country now—and the sea is our refuge." He lingered with his foot on the shore, and I entreated him to hasten, for I remembered the strokes of her heart against my breast and thought that two men cannot withstand a hundred. We left, paddling down—stream close to the bank; and as we passed by the creek where they were fishing, the great shouting had ceased, but the murmur of voices was loud like the humming of insects flying at noonday. The boats floated, clustered together, in the red light of torches, under a black roof of smoke; and men talked of their sport. Men that boasted, and praised, and jeered—men that would have been our friends in the morning, but on that night were already our enemies. We paddled swiftly past. We had no more friends in the country of our birth. She sat in the middle of the canoe with covered face; silent as she is now; unseeing as she is now—and I had no regrets at what I was leaving because I could hear her breathing close to me—as I can hear her now.'

He paused, listened with his ear turned to the doorway, then shook his head and went on:

'My brother wanted to shout the cry of challenge—one cry only—to let the people know we were freeborn robbers who trusted our arms and the great sea. And again I begged him in the name of our love to be silent. Could I not hear her breathing close to me? I knew the pursuit would come quick enough. My brother loved me. He dipped his paddle without a splash. He only said, "There is half a man in you now—the other half is in that woman. I can wait. When you are a whole man again, you will come back with me here to shout defiance. We are sons of the same mother." I made no answer. All my strength and all my spirit were in my hands that held the paddle—for I longed to be with her in a safe place beyond the reach of men's anger and of women's spite. My love was so

great, that I thought it could guide me to a country where death was unknown, if I could only escape from Inchi Midha's fury and from our Ruler's sword. We paddled with haste, breathing through our teeth, The blades bit deep into the smooth water. We passed out of the river; we flew in clear channels amongst the shallows. We skirted the black coast; we skirted the sand beaches where the sea speaks in whispers to the land; and the gleam of white sand flashed back past our boat, so swiftly she ran upon the water. We spoke not. Only once I said, "Sleep, Diamelen, for soon you may want all your strength." I heard the sweetness of her voice, but I never turned my head. The sun rose and still we went on. Water fell from my face like rain from a cloud. We flew in the light and heat. I never looked back, but I knew that my brother's eyes, behind me, were looking steadily ahead, for the boat went as straight as a bushman's dart, when it leaves the end of the sumpitan.⁵ There was no better paddler, no better steersman than my brother. Many times, together, we had won races in that canoe. But we never had put our strength as we did then—then, when for the last time we paddled together! There was no braver or stronger man in our country than my brother. I could not spare the strength to turn my head and look at him, but every moment I heard the his of his breath getting louder behind me. Still he did not speak. The sun was high. The head clung to my back like a flame of fire. My ribs were ready to burst, but I could no longer get enough air into my chest. And then I felt I must cry out with my last breath, "Let us rest!"... "Good!" he answered; and his voice was firm. He was strong. He was brave. He knew not fear and no fatigue... My brother!

A murmur powerful and gentle, a murmur vast and faint; the murmur of trembling leaves, of stirring boughs, ran through the tangled depths of the forests, ran over the starry smoothness of the lagoon, and the water between the piles lapped the slimy timber once with a sudden splash. A breath of warm air touched the two men's faces and passed on with a mournful sound—

a breath loud and short like an uneasy sigh of the dreaming earth.

Arsat went on in an even, low voice.

‘We ran our canoe on the white beach of a little bay close to a long tongue of land that seemed to bar our road; a long wooded cape going far into the sea. My brother knew that place. Beyond the cape a river has its entrance, and through the jungle of that land there is a narrow path. We made a fire and cooked rice. Then we lay down to sleep on the soft sand in the shade of our canoe, while she watched. No sooner had I closed my eyes than I heard her cry of alarm. We leaped up. The sun was halfway down the sky already, and coming in sight in the opening of the bay we saw a prau manned by many paddlers. We knew it at once; it was one of our Rajah’s praus. They were watching the shore, and saw us. They beat the gong, and turned the head of the prau into the bay. I felt my heart become weak within my breast. Diamelen sat on the sand and covered her face. There was no escape by sea. My brother laughed. He had the gun you had given him, Tuan, before you went away, but there was only a handful of powder. He spoke to me quickly: “Run with her along the path. I shall keep them back, for they have no firearms, and landing in the face of a man with a gun is certain death for some. Run with her. On the other side of that wood there is a fisherman’s house—and a canoe. When I have fired all the shots I will follow. I am a great runner, and before they can come up we shall be gone. I will hold out as long as I can, for she is but a woman—that can neither run nor fight, but she has your heart in her weak hands.” He dropped behind the canoe. The prau was coming. She and I ran, and as we rushed along the path I heard shots. My brother fired—once—twice—and the booming of the gong ceased. There was silence behind us. That neck of land is narrow. Before I heard my brother fire the third shot I saw the shelving shore, and I saw the water again; the mouth of a broad river. We crossed a grassy glade. We ran down to the water. I saw

a low hut above the black mud, and a small canoe hauled up. I heard another shot behind me. I thought, "That is his last charge." We rushed down to the canoe; a man came running from the hut, but I leaped on him, and we rolled together in the mud. Then I got up, and he lay still at my feet. I don't know whether I had killed him or not. I and Diamelen pushed the canoe afloat. I heard yells behind me, and I saw my brother run across the glade. Many men were bounding after him, I took her in my arms and threw her into the boat, then leaped in myself. When I looked back I saw that my brother had fallen. He fell and was up again, but the men were closing round him. He shouted, "I am coming!" The men were close to him. I looked. Many men. Then I looked at her. Tuan, I pushed the canoe! I pushed it into deep water. She was kneeling forward looking at me, and I said, "Take you paddle," while I struck the water with mine. Tuan, I heard him cry. I heard him cry my name twice; and I heard voices shouting, "Kill! Strike!" I never turned back. I heard him calling my name again with a great shriek, as when life is going out together with the voice—and I never turned my head. My own name!... My brother! Three times he called—but I was not afraid of life. Was she not there in that canoe? And could I not with her find a country where death is forgotten—where death is unknown!

The white man sat up. Arsat rose and stood, an indistinct and silent figure above the dying embers of the fire. Over the lagoon a mist drifting and low has crept, erasing slowly the glittering images of the stars. And now a great expanse of white vapour covered the land: it flowed cold and grey in the darkness, eddied in noiseless whirls round the tree-trunks and about the platform of the house, which seemed to float upon a restless and impalpable illusion of a sea. Only far away the tops of the trees stood outlined on the twinkle of heaven, like a sombre and forbidding shore—a coast deceptive, pitiless and black.

Arsat's voice vibrated loudly in the profound peace.

'I had her there! I had her! To get her I would have faced

all mankind. But I had her—and—'

His words went out ringing into the empty distances. He paused, and seemed to listen to them dying away very far — beyond help and beyond recall. Then he said quietly—

'Tuan, I loved my brother.'

A breath of wind made him shiver. High above his head, high above the silent sea of mist the drooping leaves of the palms rattled together with a mournful and expiring sound. The white man stretched his legs. His chin rested on his chest, and he murmured sadly without lifting his head—

'We all love our brothers'.

Arsat burst out with an intense whispering violence

'What did I care who died? I wanted peace in my own heart.'

He seemed to hear a stir in the house—listened—then stepped in noiselessly. The white man stood up. A breeze was coming in fitful puffs. The stars shone paler as if they had retreated into the frozen depths of immense space. After a chill gust of wind there were a few seconds of perfect calm and absolute silence. Then from behind the black and wavy line of the forests a column of golden light shot up into the heavens and spread over the semicircle of the eastern horizon. The sun had risen. The mist lifted, broke into drifting patches, vanished into thin flying wreaths; and the unveiled lagoon lay, polished and black, in the heavy shadows at the foot of the wall of trees. A white eagle rose over it with a slanting and ponderous flight, reached the clear sunshine and appeared dazzlingly brilliant for a moment, then soaring higher, became a dark and motionless speck before it vanished into the blue as it had left the earth forever. The white man, standing gazing upwards before the doorway, heard in the hut a confused and broken murmur of distracted words ending with a loud groan. Suddenly Arsat stumbled out with outstretched hands, shivered, and stood still for some time with fixed eyes. Then he said—

‘She burns no more.’

Before his face the sun showed its edge above the tree-tops rising steadily. The breeze freshened; a great brilliance burst upon the lagoon, sparkled on the rippling water. The forests came out of the clear shadows of the morning, became distinct, as if they had rushed nearer—to stop short in a great stir of leaves, of nodding boughs, of swaying branches. In the merciless sunshine the whisper of unconscious life grew louder, speaking in an incomprehensible voice round the dumb darkness of that human sorrow. Arsat’s eyes wandered slowly, then stared at the rising sun.

‘I can see nothing,’ he said half aloud to himself.

‘There is nothing,’ said the white man, moving to the edge of the platform and waving his hand to his boat. A shout came faintly over the lagoon and the sampan began to glide towards the abode of the friend of ghosts.

‘If you want to come with me, I will wait all the morning,’ said the white man, looking away upon the water.

‘No, Tuan,’ said Arsat, softly. ‘I shall not eat or sleep in this house, but I must first see my road. Now I can see nothing—see nothing! There is no light and no peace in the world; but there is death—death for many. We are sons of the same mother—and I left him in the midst of enemies; but I am going back now.’

He drew a long breath and went on in a dreamy tone:

‘In a little while I shall see clear enough to strike—to strike. But she has died, and.... now... darkness.’

He flung his arms wide open, met them fall along his body, then stood still with unmoved face and stony eyes, staring at the sun. The white man got down into his canoe. The polers ran smartly along the sides of the boat, looking over their shoulders at the beginning of a weary journey. High in the stern, his head muffled up in white rags, the juragan sat moody, letting

his paddle trail in the water. The white man, leaning with both arms over the grass roof of the little cabin, looked back at the shining ripple of the boat's wake. Before the sampan passed out of the lagoon into the creek he lifted his eyes. Arsat had not moved. He stood lonely in the searching sunshine; and he looked beyond the great light of a cloudless day into the darkness of a world of illusions.

THE LOST JEWELS

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

My boat lay moored at the steps of a dilapidated ghat. The sun had just gone down.

On the roof of the boat the boatmen were engaged in their evening prayers. Their silent figures, kneeling and bowing, outlined against the dying glow of the western sky, seemed like a fleeting image. The un-ruffled surface of the river reflected every colour and every intensity in the spectrum of light, from palest gold to darkest steel blue.

A decrepit old mansion with broken windows and tumble-down verandas looked down as I sat on the darkening stone steps of the ghat, which were cracking between the roots of a nearby banyan tree, and listened to the hum of the crickets. I was alone and felt a little forlorn. My eyes had become slightly moist with tears, when all of a sudden I was thoroughly startled by a voice asking. 'Sir, where are you coming from?'

I saw a man of half-starved appearance, obviously down on his luck. His face had that deprived look common among my countrymen when they take up service away from home. Above his dhoti he wore a greasy-looking coat of coarse Assamese silk. It seemed as if he was on his way back from a day's work, ready for his evening meal at home, and had decided to stop at the riverbank for a breath of air.

The stranger settled down beside me on the steps. I replied, 'I've come from Ranchi.'

'What do you do?'

'I am a merchant.'

'What kind?'

'I deal in myrobalan, silk cocoons and timber.'

'What name?'

I hesitated, then gave a name. But it was not my own.

Still the man's curiosity was not satisfied. He asked again, 'But why come to this place?'

I said, 'For a change of air.'

This astonished him. 'Sir, I have been taking the air here for almost six years now, along with fifteen grains of quinine daily, and I am yet to see any good result.'

'Still, you must admit that after Ranchi this place is quite a change.'

'Indeed it is, that it most certainly is,' he said. 'Where will you put up here?'

Pointing to the ruined building above the ghat I said, 'There.'

I think the man suspected I was in search of buried treasure in the deserted mansion. But he kept his suspicions to himself and instead launched into a lengthy and loquacious tale of events which had taken place in the accursed building some fifteen years before.

I learnt that the man was the schoolmaster of the place. As he talked, I noticed an unnatural brightness in his large eyes which stared from their sockets in his wasted face beneath his enormous bald plate. He made me think of the Ancient Mariner of the English poet Coleridge.

The boatmen finished their prayers and began to concentrate on the cooking. The last gleams of light faded from the sky and the desolate mansion at the top of the ghat stood dark and motionless like a ghost of its earlier self.

The schoolmaster started to tell his story.

'About ten years prior to my arrival here, Phani Bhushan Shaha occupied this house. He had inherited the entire property and business of his uncle Durga Mohan Shaha, who was without a son.

'But, unlike Durga Mohan, Phani Bhushan was a man of

the modern age. He had been educated. He spoke excellent English. He even entered the business offices of English sahibs without removing his shoes. And he grew a beard in the modern manner. Thus there could be no hope of his advancing his career in the world of the sahibs. For anyone could see that Phani Bhushan was what is known as a New Bengali.

‘And he had another handicap, this one domestic. His wife was a beauty. So, what with a college education and a beautiful wife, our old traditions stood little chance. In fact, if he was taken ill, Phani Bhushan used to call not for the village doctor but for the assistant surgeon, a sahib. The food, clothes and ornaments in his house all followed the same line of thinking.

‘Sir, you are undoubtedly married, so I need hardly tell you that the average wife likes sour mangoes, hot chillies and a strict husband. The husband who is unfortunate enough to be deprived of his wife’s love, will not necessarily be an ugly or poor man, but he will certainly be too considerate.’

‘You may ask why this should be. Well, the subject is one to which I have given much thought. When a person’s propensity for something cannot be exercised, the person is not content. To sharpen its horns, the deer looks for the bole of a hardwood tree; the soft stem of a plantain gives it no satisfaction. Ever since the two sexes came into existence, women have been sharpening their skills of man-taming in every possible way. Thus the husband who tames himself of his own free will, leaves the wife unemployed: all those weapons she has inherited from generations of gradmothers—those centuries-old sobs, tantrums and snaring glances, as ancient as the gods—are rendered entirely futile.

‘Therefore, in case where the wife needs to express her love by en-chantino her husband but the husband is too gentle to give her the opportunity, there is trouble in store for both of them, particularly from the wife.

‘You see, under the spell of modern civilization men have

forsaken their natural-born God-given barbarity, and the conjugal ties have become loosened. The luckless Phani Bhushan had emerged from the machine of modern civilization an absolutely faultless man—with the result that he was successful neither in business nor in his domestic life.

‘Mani Malika, his wife, received caresses without her having to make any effort, Dacca muslin saris without having to shed any tears, and bangles without being able to pride herself on an emotional victory. Hence her woman’s nature, and with it her capacity for love, atrophied. She only received, and never gave; while her innocent and foolish husband imagined that by giving, he would receive. His approach was a thoroughly misguided one.

‘The upshot was, that Phani Bhushan came to be regraded by his wife as a mere machine for producing saris and bangles; a machine so well made that its wheels never needed a drop of oil.

‘Phani Bhushan’s birthplace was at Phulbere, the house here was his office. For reasons of business he spent most of his time here. His mother was no longer alive at the Phulbere house, thought he had plenty of aunts and other relatives there. But Phani Bhushan had not married a pretty wife for their benefit, so he took Mani Malika away from them and kept her here in this house, alone. There is a key difference between a wife and other possessions, however: by keeping her away from everyone, all to oneself, one may lose her completely.

‘Mani Malika did not talk much, nor did she have much to do with her neighbours, nor was it her custom to feed Brahmins in obedience to some vow, or give alms to local Vaishnava nuns. In her hands nothing was ever wasted, everything was most carefully saved, with the sole exception of the affection of her husband. And the really remarkable thing was that there was not the slightest hint of waste in her amazing beauty. People used to say that at the age of twenty-four Mani Malika looked as tender as she had at fourteen. Perhaps it is those with icy

hearts, into which the pangs of love cannot penetrate, who stay freshest longest; they are misers, who freeze their emotional as well as their physical assets.

'Like a creeper suffocating a plant, the Almighty had prevented Mani Malika from flowering, deprived her of offspring. In other words, God had kept from her a gift which she would have come to know as more valuable than the jewels in her iron safe; a gift which like the mild sunshine of an early spring morning would have thawed her heart and released its affection into the world like a fountain.

'But as far as her household duties were concerned, Mani Malika was a hard worker. She never kept more servants than was absolutely necessary, for she could not bear to pay anyone to do work she could do herself. With no worries about anyone and none of the distractions of love, she simply worked and saved, without anger or anguish; and with her constant good health, mental tranquillity and growing wealth, she appeared to reign over the house very firmly.

'For the majority of husbands this arrangement is enough—I should really say more than enough. It is akin to having lumbago—or rather, to not having lumbago; for as long as you have no pain in your waist, you do not think about your waist any more than you think about your arms and legs. So, in marital matters, there is no lumbago until a wife chooses to urge her love upon her husband at every moment of the day and night. Excessive devotion may be something glorious for a wife, we are told, but it is uncomfortable for a husband—at least that is my decided opinion.

'Surely, sir, it is not up to a man to put his wife's love in a jeweller's balance day in and day out. She should do her work, I should do mine—that is the long and short of it. Exactly how much has been left unsaid, the precise degree of feeling left unspoken and the precise position of every atom in a relationship, the Almighty did not give men the power to detect, because there was no need. It is only women who weigh up

the tiniest discrepancies in a man's affections. They analyse mere words and extract the real meaning from them with sure and refined skill. For it is a man's love that gives a woman her strength, her capital in the business of life. If she can feel the way the wind is blowing and pick her moment to launch her boat, she will sail successfully. That is why God has installed love's compass in the hearts of women and not in those of men.

'Nowadays, though men have acquired what God did not choose to give them. Poets are overriding the gods and putting this precious instrument, this compass, promiscuously into the hands of men. The Almighty is not to be blamed for creating men and women separate, but the fact is that civilization is obliterating the distinction: now women are becoming manly and men are becoming effeminate, and the home is perforce bidding farewell to peace and stability. Now, before they marry, both bride and bridegroom feel thoroughly disconcerted by the thought that they may be wedding their own sex.

'But sir, I think you are wearying of my discussion! You see, I am forced by circumstances to live alone, banished from the company of my wife, and here many profound social issues come to my mind which I cannot discuss with my pupils. As we continue talking, I shall present my ideas for your consideration.

'At any rate, although Mani Malika's cooking did not lack salt and the *pan* did not lack lime, her husband's heart was troubled by some vague anxiety. The wife had no particular fault, yet the husband was not happy. And so he went on pouring diamond and pearl jewellery into the cavity of her heart, thereby filling her iron safe but leaving her heart as empty as ever. Old Durga Mohan Shaha had known nothing of love's finer delights, had never yearned for them or given generously to his wife, yet he had received ample return from her. To be a success in business, one must not be a modern type of man, and to succeed as a husband one must be manly—of this you should have no doubt.'

As the schoolmaster said these words, there was a raucous howl from some jackals in a nearby thicket. The torrent of his talk stopped for a moment. It was as if some frivolous yokels had been listening all along to the schoolmaster's musings on conjugal morality and the over-civilized meekness of Phani Bhushan, and had suddenly burst into laughter. When the outburst had died down, the silence over both land and water lay deeper still: in the darkness the schoolmaster's eyes seemed to glow even brighter as he resumed telling his story.

'All of a sudden, Phani Bhushan struck danger in his tangled and extensive business affairs. What exactly had transpired, a layman such as I can neither grasp nor explain. But its effect was that without any warning Phani Bhushan found it difficult to obtain credit. He knew that if he could but raise a lakh and a half of rupees and flash them in front of the market, the danger would pass and his business would sail on smoothly.

'But the money was hard to come by. Were he to try to borrow it where he was well known, he feared that he would cause his business further harm; and so his thoughts turned to getting loans in unfamiliar places. But he knew that strangers would require security.

'Now of course jewellery is the best security because it avoids complex documents having to be signed, and makes the process to taking a loan quick and simple. So Phani Bhushan went at once to his wife. However, whereas most husbands can face their wives easily enough, Phani Bhushan could not. Unluckily for him, his love for her was of the variety celebrated by poets; it felt bound to tread circumspectly and could not speak plainly; like the attraction of the sun and the earth, it was strong yet kept its distance.

'But even heroes of romances sometimes get themselves into corners which compel them to mention to their beloveds such things as bills of exchange and promissory notes. Nevertheless, the tune sounds wrong, the tongue fumbles, and note of unease disrupts what was for-merly calm and orderly.

The unfortunate Phani Bhushan was quite inca-pable of saying bluntly to his wife,, "Dear, I'm in need of money, bring out your jewels."

"He did ask her for them, but only with extreme delicacy. When Mani Malika responded by hardening her face and saying nothing, he felt the blow cruelly; but he did not hurt her back. For there was not a trace of masculine barbarity in him. Where he should have snatched by force, instead he suppressed his urge. Where love is the sole arbiter, one must not give way to force, even in times of disaster—that was what he believed. Had soemone tackled him on the subject, most likely Phani Bhushan would have come out with some argument such as the following: "Just because the market won't give me credit for unfair reasons does not give the right to rob it: if my wife will not trust me with her jewels of her own free will, I cannot grab them. Whether it be a business matter or an affair of the heart, force belongs only to the battlefield." But sir, was it to debate such fine-spun ideals that God endowed men with so much courage and strength? Have they the leisure to indulge the subtle nuances of such tender emotions, and does it befit them to do so?

'Whatever may be the case, Phani Bhushan, priding himself on being unable to touch his wife's jewels, left for Calcutta, in order to find other means of raising money.

'Now although, as a rule, a wife knows her husband better than a husband knows his wife, certain husbands have natures so refined they are not entirely perceptible even under a wife's microscope. Our Phani Bhushan was one such husband. Extremely modern men like him lie beyond the range of old-fashioned wifely wisdom. They belong to a new race of men, as mysterious as women. Ordinary men divide into three rough categories—barbarians, fools and blunt fellows—but these modern men fit none of the categories.

'And so Mani Malika felt a need for an adviser. Madhu Shudan was some kind of relative of hers, an assistant steward

on Phani Bhushan's estate. His position had more to do with family ties than with hard work, which was not in his character: and he managed to save both his salary and even a little more.

'Mani Malika explained everything and finished up with, "Now what do you advise?"

'Madhu Shudan shook his head wisely; he did not like the look of things at all. Such wise characters never do. He said, "Babu will never be able to raise the money, in the end he will take your jewellery."

"Mani Malika, on the basis of her experience of men, thought this not only probable but very likely. Her anxiety became intense. She had no children, and though she had a husband, she did not feel his presence in her heart. And so the idea that her precious wealth, which she had been tending all these years almost like a growing child, which sparkled softly upon her breast, around her throat and on her hair—the very thought that all this might be flung into the bottomless pit of commerce in an instant, made her blood run cold. She cried out, "What is to be done?"

"You must take the jewels to your father's house," the sage Madhu Shudan suggested. A plan had formed in his mind, in which a portion of the jewels, perhaps even the major portion, would fall to his lot. Mani Malika immediately consented.

'On a rainy night in late Asharh, the monsoon month, at this very ghat, a boat came to be moored. In the dense darkness before dawn, as frogs tirelessly croaked, shrouded from head to foot in a thick shawl, Mani Malika stepped aboard. The waiting Madhu Shudan rubbed his eyes and said, "Give me the jewel box." Mani replied, "Not now, later. Untie the boat."

'The boat became free and was pulled into the swift current.

'Mani Malika had spent the entire night draping her whole body, from top to toe, with jewels. If kept in the box, they might be snatched from her: that was her dread. But kept about her

body she knew they could not be taken—without her first being murdered.

‘Not having got near the box Madhu Shudan could not guess that beneath the thick shawl Mani Malika was guarding with her life that which meant more to her than life. For she may not have understood her husband Phani Bhushan, but Madhu Shudan she most definitely understood.

‘He had sent a letter to the chief steward explaining that he was taking the mistress to her paternal home. The chief steward had been in Phani Bhushan’s service since the days of the father and he was so indignant that he wrote a letter to his master. Though the quality of its grammar left something to be desired, it left the recipient in absolutely no doubt that to indulge a wife in this way did not befit a man.

‘For his part, Phani Bhushan understood Mani Malika’s motive only too well. And he felt terribly hurt: how could she still suspect him, despite his willingness to forgo her jewels and make desperate efforts to raise money by other means? He thought, even now she does not know me.

‘Where he should have been enraged, he was only mortified. For is a man not God’s rod of justice, on whom is bestowed the power to express divine wrath? —lie upon him if he fails to flash in anger at injustice done to anyone, including himself! In earlier times, the slightest provocation would make a man burst out in anger like a monsoon rain cloud. But times seem to have changed.

‘And so Phani Bhushan noted his wife’s offence and yet told himself, “If that is your decision, so be it. I will carry on and do my duty.” He should have been born five or six centuries from now, when psychic forces will prevail, but instead he had been deposited in the nineteenth century and married to a woman of atavistic mind. Phani Bhushan chose to write his wife not a single word on the subject of her departure, and resolved never to mention it to her. What a severe vow to take!

‘About ten days later, after raising the necessary loan without too much trouble, Phani Bhushan reappeared at his house. By now, he imagined, Mani Malika would have dealt with her jewels and come home. Wondering if she would show any sign of repentance for her unnecessary and shameful act when she saw his success, he approached the door of the inner apartments.

‘It was shut. He had the lock broken, entered the room and saw that it was empty. He opened the door of the iron safe and saw no trace of the jewels. His heart hammered. The world seemed without purpose, both love and money-making totally without meaning. For what is the point of our killing ourselves in trying to cage the world when the bird always escapes, never settles? Why do we persist in decorating each bar of the cage with rubies like heart’s blood and pearls like teardrops? A lifetime’s accumulation of possessions seemed suddenly pointless to Phani Bhushan, and he mentally gave the lot a tremendous kick.

‘To begin with, his wife’s absence did not trouble him much. He thought—when she’s ready, she will return. But then his old steward came and said, “To do nothing is not right, you must seek news of the mistress.” And so someone was despatched to the house of Mani Malika’s people. Word came that neither Mani nor Madhu had been seen there.

‘Then a search began in every direction. People made enquiries along both riverbanks. The police were given a description of Madhu, but they could find out nothing: neither which boat they had taken, nor who the boatman was, nor which route they had followed.

‘One evening, with all hope now gone, Phani Bhushan entered his deserted bedroom. It was the time of Janmashtami, the festival of Lord Krishna’s birth, and from the morning onwards rain had fallen incessantly. The festival was in full swing on some waste ground in the village; beneath a temporary thatched awning, everyone was absorbed in a theatre-cum-opera

performance. The sound of singing was half-audible to Phani Bhushan through the drumming of the torrential downpour. He sat alone beside a window with a loose hinge—but his mind was not conscious of the moist breeze, the spray of the rain and the distant cries of the performers. Inside, on one wall of the room, hung garishly painted prints of the goddesses Lakshmi and Saraswati, while on a clothes rack a couple of towels and two saris, one striped and the other plain with a striped border, were laid out ready for use. In a corner of the room on a teapy stood a brass tray with a few shrivelled betel leaves folded to make pan by Mani Malika's own hand. Inside a glass-fronted almirah her china dolls from childhood days, her scent bottles and decanters of coloured glass, a pack of luxury cards, some large polished cowrie shells and even some empty soap boxes lay neatly arranged; and there, in the wall, in its appointed niche, stood her small kerosene lamp with its fancy round globe which she used to light every evening—its wick now dry and languishing. That insignificant lamp had been a silent witness of Mani Malika's last hours in this bedroom, thought Phani Bhushan. When someone goes away, abandoning everything, how her loving mark remains on her lifeless possessions! Come Mani, come and light your flame once again, fill your room with light, stand before your mirror and put on one of those saris lying there so carefully folded by you—all your things are here, awaiting you. No one will demand anything from you, only come and infuse life into these scattered and orphaned objects with your undying youth and unfaded beauty; their inarticulate cries have made your room a funereal place.

'Evening became night, the heavy rain stopped, and there was a break in the singing at the all-night performance. Phani Bhushan sat on, quite still. The darkness beyond the window became so all enveloping and closely woven that he felt as if he were standing before the towering portals of Death itself—as if he had only to cry out and a vision of all the things that

seemed lost for ever would be disclosed to him. On Death's jet-black expanse, that unyielding touchstone, did he see a very faint streak of gold?

'With this thought there came a sort of rapping sound, mixed with the jingle of jewellery. The sound seemed to advance up the steps of the ghat from the river. Water and darkness were as one. Phani Bhushan's skin tingled with excitement, and his eyes probed each square of darkness so eagerly they ached—but not a thing was visible. The more desperately he stared the denser seemed the darkness, and the more insubstantial the outside world. It was as if nature, seeing a stranger attempting to peer into the abode of death of night, had swiftly pulled a curtain over the entrance.

'The sound reached the top of the ghat. It began to advance towards the house. When it reached the door, it paused. The main door had been locked by the doorkeeper when he went off to see the opera. From outside it there now came a clatter of knocks and jingles as of ornaments frantically striking wood. Phani Bhushan could not restrain himself. Hastening through the lightless rooms and feeling his way down the darkened staircase, he arrived at the main door. It had been padlocked from the outside. He seized the handles with both hands and gave the door a violent shake: so great was the racket that it woke him. He realized he had sleep-walked. His whole body was drenched in sweat, his hands and feet were cold as ice and his heart was trembling like a lamp on the point of snuffing out. Now he knew that there was no sound outside, except the falling of rain, which had started again, mingled with the melodies of the village performers; he could hear children singing the last act before the dawn.

'But although it was all a dream, Phani Bhushan felt that he had come extremely close to something that vitally concerned him, the realization of his impossible yearning, of which he had been cheated, he felt, by the merest of obstacles. The pattering of the rain seemed to speak to him like some

detached and far-off strain of raga Bhairavi: "Your awakening is but a dream, this world is but illusion."

'The following day, the festival continued and the doorkeeper again took the night off'. Phani Bhushan gave instructions that the door be left unlocked all night. The doorkeeper protested, "Sir, at festival time there are all sorts of people from all over the place about – it isn't safe to leave the door open." Phani Bhushan would have none of it. So the doorkeeper said, "I shall stay and keep watch all night." Phani Bhushan replied, "There's no need, go and listen to the show." This puzzled the doorkeeper, but he did as he was told.

'That evening, after extinguishing the lamp, Phani Bhushan took his place beside the bedroom window. The clouds covering the sky were swollen with rain and the outside world lay motionless as if profoundly expectant. Even the unceasing croak of the frogs and the songs and cries of the village performers could not disturb such stillness, but rather served to deepen it by their weird incogruity.

'It became late, the frogs and crickets and boys of the opera party finally fell quiet, and an even deeper darkness settled over everything. The hour was clearly nigh.

'As on the previous night, from the direction of the ghat the rapping and jingling sound was heard. But tonight Phani Bhushan did not look towards it. He has a fear that his very eagerness and anxiety would render his desires and actions fruitless, would somehow bewilder his powers of sight and hearing. With a supreme effort he controlled his restlessness and sat stock still, like a statue.

'The sound, resonant, ascended gradually from the ghat and entered the house through the open door. Then it could be heard winding its way up the spiral staircase. Phani Bhushan could barely keep his vow; his heart was palpitating like a small boat in a typhoon, his breathing was becoming laboured. When the sound reached the head of the stairs, it moved slowly along

the veranda, and stopped outside with a jangling clank. It now lay just beyond the bedroom threshold.

‘Phani Bhushan could stay seated no longer. Driven by overmastering passion, he shot up like a lightning flash and yelled, “Mani!” The skrick awoke him and he heard the window panes rattle with its force. From outside once more he heard the croaking of frogs and the fatigued voices of boys singing in the village.

‘Phani Bhushan struck his forehead in despair at his impatience.

‘On the next morning, the festival broke up; and the market stalls and opera troupe moved on. Phani Bhushan gave orders that on the coming night no one but he would stay in the mansion. His servants concluded that their master intended to practise mystical Tantric rites. Throughout the day Phani Bhushan took no food.

‘That evening, he assumed his usual seat in the totally deserted house. Tonight there were gaps in the clouds and through the clear rain-rinsed air, the stars shone with extraordinary brilliance. The moon was yet to rise. On the bursting river, now that the festival was finished, not a boat was to be seen; the villagers of the area were all plunged in sleep, after two days and nights of entertainment.

‘Phani Bhushan, lying back in his chair and looking at the heavens, thought of the time when he was nineteen years old and studying in Calcutta: how at night he would lie out on the grass beside the tank in College Square with his head on his hands gazing at the eternal stars, and let his mind wander: He would see the glowing, young face of the fourteen- year-old Mani in her lonely room at her in-laws’ riverside house in the village, and feel a delicious sensation. In those days the flickering of the stars harmonized with the stirring of his young heart, as in the famous line from a Sanskrit drama about the “rhythmic movement of raga Bashanta”, the raga of Spring! While today these same stars seemed to have inscribed in fiery

letters across the sky another famous line, but from an ancient philosophical treatise: "How strange is this world!"

'As he gazed upwards, the stars seemed to fade away. A darkness fell from the sky and rose from the earth like two black lashes closing over a weary eye. Phani Bhushan's mind was at peace. He felt an inward assurance that tonight he would attain his cherished goal; and that Death would finally vouchsafe its mystery to its devotee.

'As before, the sound made its way from the river up the steps of the ghat. Phani Bhushan, eyes now closed, sat in deep meditation. The sound entered the empty hallway, wound its way up the deserted staircase, passed along the veranda of the inner apartments, and paused at the bedroom door for a long time.

'Phani Bhushan's heart was racing, and his whole body trembling, but this time he did not open his eyes. The sound crossed the threshold and entered the shadowy room. At each object in it—the clothes rack with its folded saris, the wall niche with its kerosene lamp, the teapoy with its tray of desiccated betel, the almirah with its various knick-knacks—the sound paused and hovered, until, at last, it came close to Phani Bhushan himself.

'Then he opened his eyes and saw in the faint light of the now-risen moon, standing in front of his chair, a skeleton. From top to bottom its bones glistened with gold and diamond ornaments: there were rings on its eight bony fingers and jewelled wheels on the backs of its bony hands, bangles on its bony wrists and bracelets on its bony arms, necklaces around its throat and a tiara on its skull. The ornaments hung loosely, but each was firmly attached. Most dreadfull of all was the face: from its sockets two living eyes shone out, moist, with long thick lashes and black pupils and a fixed unblinking stare. Eighteen years ago, Phani Bhushan had first seen those eyes in a brightly lit wedding hall to the accompaniment of raga Shahana, and they had been gorgeous and rapt. Seeing them

now, at dead of night in the depths of the monsoon, lit by a dying moon, he felt his blood freeze. He made a desperate effort to close his eyes, but he could not; they remained wide open, as steady as the eyes of a corpse.

‘Then the skeleton turned its gaze directly upon Phani Bhusan’s stupefied face and, noiselessly lifting its right hand, beckoned to him with its fingers. Four diamond rings flashed in the moonlight.

‘Phani Bhushan stood up as if spellbound. The skeleton began to move towards the door, its joints and jewels uttering their harsh sound. Phani Bhusan followed like a marionette. They crossed the veranda, and in pitch darkness they wound their way down the spiral stairs, clanking and jingling at every step. Passing through the lower veranda, they entered the empty unlit hall and at last they reached the pebbled garden path outside the main door. Here, as they moved, the stones crunched beneath the bony feet; the moonlight struggled feebly to reach the shadowy path through the overhanging thickets; and swarms of fireflies whirled in the humid scent of the monsoon night. Together they arrived at the top of the ghat.

‘“Here, at these very steps up which the sound had come, the jewelled skeleton commenced to descend—step by rattling step, its spine stiffly erect, its limbs rigidly inflexible. On the surface of the river’s powerful current, a streak of moonlight could just be discerned.

‘Phani Bhushan, obediently following, reached the water and dipped his foot. The instant he made contact, his drowsiness vanished. His guide too disappeared, and there remained only the silent trees brooding on the far bank of the river and the thin moon looking down in calm astonishment. A shudder convulsed Phani Bhushan’s body and he fell headlong into the current. Though he knew how to swim, his limbs were not under his control: for a mere instant he stepped across the borderland from the world of dream into the world of wakefulness—and then he was plunged into abysmal sleep.’

Having finished his account, the schoolmaster at last fell silent. I was abruptly aware that the whole world had fallen still and silent too. For a long time I sat without saying a word, and in the darkness the schoolmaster was unable to see the expression on my face.

Then he said, 'You don't believe the story.'

I asked him, 'Do you believe it?'

He said, 'No, and I have several reasons for not believing. In the first place, Dame Nature does not write stories, her hands are already full with—'

'And secondly,' I interrupted, 'my name is Phani Bhushan Shaha.'

The schoolmaster was not in the least embarrassed: 'I guessed as much. And your wife's real name—what was it?'

I told him, 'Nritya Kali.'[†]

[†]'Dancing Kali', an incarnation of goddess Kali who frequents the burning ghats and dances on the ashes of the dead. By mistake she dances on her sleeping husband, Lord Shiva, Nritya Kali is a highly improbable name for a Bengali woman of a respectable family.